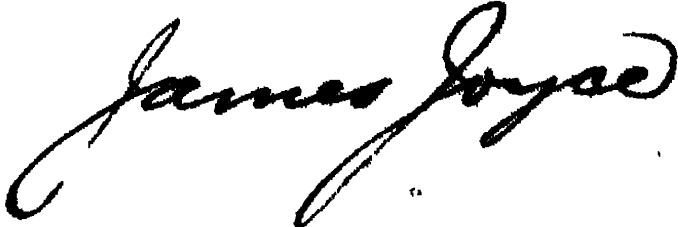


HONEYMOON DIALOGUES

BY

JAMES JAMES



James Joyce

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TO BABETTE—
ALL OF THEM

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HONEYMOON DIALOGUES

DIALOGUE ONE

THE CATALOGUE

"A Woman has to Marry before she can begin to have a 'Past.'"—*The Bâbette Birthday Book.*

I THOUGHT she was asleep. By the shaded light I could see her piquant face cuddled into the pillow, with one of her two plaits of auburn hair—like a sunlit stream flowing through a country of snow—lying smoothly against the white of her wonderful neck and the filmy lace of her absurdly open-work night-dress. I half-raised my head to take in the dainty picture. We had been married only two months; and not even three weeks of matrimony—the rest was honeymoon, which doesn't count as time; no clock has ever been invented that could measure the minutes (or, is it years?) of a honeymoon—not even these three weeks of domestic intimacy had sufficed to render me indifferent to the wonder of seeing, regularly, night after night, that adorable face on the pillow of my bed.

I shall never forget the revelation it was to me the first morning I saw my wife asleep. It was on one of the mornings of that nightmare of happiness, the honeymoon. I had wakened early, and, leaning on my elbow, I looked down on this new creature, really, in this respect, a comparative stranger, who had somehow forced her laughing way into my life. No man ever sees his

fiancée asleep—or he shouldn't. This, of course, accounts for the marriage of so many girls who snore.

Babette did not snore, she assured me passionately, and hastily accused me of a nasal basso that kept her awake for hours and hours. Now, I know I don't snore; this was merely the woman's way of making a countercharge, in the heated defence of which the original charge will be forgotten. But her snore was the most charming snore I had ever heard. I thought so during the honeymoon; I think so now. Besides, with such a ridiculous nose as Babette possessed, how could she help snoring? It was such an intimate snore—a gentle soothing whisper, like the murmur of doves, or the delicate music her brushes made as she straightened out her curly hair, which had a habit of getting all tangled up with crinkly bits of sunlight.

But I'm forgetting the first time I saw Babette asleep. She was not snoring then. As I looked at her, I thought, almost with a shudder, that I had married a child. Her passive face, lacking the laughter of her dark eyes and the provocation of her parted lips, seemed to me the face of some strange little girl. It didn't seem quite conventional that she should be lying so comfortably there. I could not recognise the grown woman I had married, nor the soul of the girl I had wooed—that soul of a wind-blown flame. She looked so calm, so completely content, so utterly forgetful of me, that almost in a cold fear at her strangeness I had to waken her with a kiss. It was my Babette who came up, like a drowned face, from the depths of dream. Her slow, reminiscent smile brought her completely back to me.

And now—to get back to where I started. . . . The trouble in writing the book of Babette is that she is so

various, so slippery, so elusive, that in the act of dipping my pen into the ink-pot I lose track of one of her hundred aspects, beguiled away by another, and more entrancing, one. There must be quite a lot of Babettes in my little ink-pot.

You see? She has led me away again !

I noticed how, as I leant and looked at her, that her night-dress was a new one, with waves of little spray-like white silk ribbons running rippling through its filmy openness. In my bachelor days, though I had bestowed much thought upon the subject, I had never imagined that women need so many night-dresses. A man, if he is lucky or luxurious, possesses three suits of pyjamas. But a bride, so Babette informed me early in our honeymoon, must have a dozen of everything. It is only lately that I have begun to comprehend the comprehensiveness of that "everything." Babette was trousseaued enough to stand a Siege of Troy.

But Babette was not asleep—though she certainly ought to have been, since it was past midnight, and we had said good-night half an hour ago. I could tell that by her breathing. It had not the slow tidal pulse that always made me think of her as something elemental, some emanation of the unconscious world, unruffled by the touch of that quick little modern woman's brain of her. I liked to think of her so. Now, with her eyes shut, what was she, in her drowsy brain, thinking of—or, maybe, merely mooning over? When you come to think of it, women do moon a lot more than they think, don't they?

I was soon to know; for, suddenly, like a moonrise, she opened those long-lashed eyes of hers, saw me with the lover's look in my eyes, and smiled the slow smile of a pleased child.

"Not asleep yet?" she whispered.

"I've been thinking," I answered.

Wives don't like their husbands to think in their presence. It seems to them like shutting a door in their faces. You always have to tell them what was behind that closed door.

"What about, sir?" she demanded, almost jealously

"You."

"But what about me?"

"Just you."

"Ah!" She was satisfied. "But do you know what I was thinking about?" she asked.

"Me," I confidently said.

"No. Marriage."

"Same thing."

"Not at all. Why, we've been married two whole months! We're quite an old married couple, aren't we?"

"Feel like it?" I confidently smiled.

"Yes," she laughingly lied. "And that's what I wanted to ask you about, dearest."

"What?" I wondered.

"A woman is curious, you know. And I'm quite a married woman now."

"Looks like it," I said, with a glance around the bedroom. Babette is certainly not tidy. I can't get her to hang her things up, and there are so many things to hang up. She just throws them anywhere, like a tired child when told to put his toys away. I wonder if all wives are like that. There's something communal in wives, I think. There is not a single thing in the house that is sacredly mine, except my towel and my toothbrush, and all the hooks in all the wardrobes are hers, and every square inch of the floor.

"Well?" she said shyly. Then, indignantly, "You might help me out! You know well enough what I want to find out."

"Haven't the least idea," I assured her. "The only thing I notice is that you've got a new night-dress on."

"Oh, you noticed that, stupid! Pretty, don't you think?"

"Airy."

"It's a summer nightie, silly. Hand-worked, too, all of it."

I had learnt woman's incomprehensible adoration of hand-work. I had had two months' tuition in its intricacies. Why woman should go to the trouble to make hard knots and edges on her night attire, when she could have it comfortable and plain and free from draughts, no husband has been able to find out. Though, to be sure, most husbands prefer them that way. But a man does not put knots and ribbons and bows on his pyjamas. But then no male is fool enough to wear things all day that leave a criss-cross pattern on his back when he takes them off at night. Scientists tell us that the female bears pain more easily than the male, because she hasn't such delicate nerves. Consider for instance, a man with toothache. I have already tried to explain this cold scientific fact to Babette; but, so far, I am not sure that I have convinced her. She says that it is because men are cowards, while women are uncomplaining heroines.

"But you only noticed it just now?" Babette complained.

"Hadn't time before. I really didn't see the night-dress. I only saw you."

"Is it so open-work as that?" she gasped, with a thrill that was not of shame.

I explained foolishly, to her evident disappointment, that that was not what I had meant. I told her that men do not notice details in a woman's dress, or comparative lack of dress—they see only the woman in

the dress. And that, in this case, the wearer of the lack of dress was worth all the attention I could concentrate on any object for the next ten years.

It seemed to console her. "I'll have to reward you for that," she said, and leant over and kissed me—the commonplace kiss of married life, the sort that so easily, so comfortably, fills in the pauses.

"But it isn't about your night-dress that you wanted to ask me," I reminded her, as she settled back comfortably on the pillow.

She brought her mind back, with an effort, from her reverie on night-dresses; and a serious look came oddly on a face that was not meant for seriousness.

"Certainly not," she said. "Dearest, it's a most important thing; but I think that as your wife I have a right to know."

I braced myself. A dozen inconvenient things that she had a right to know flashed through my mind.

"What is it?" I asked warily.

She was still sufficiently a bride to blush. "About the . . . the other women you've . . . loved," she whispered.

"Oh!" I muttered, making a hurried mental selection.

"I want to know about them all," she went more confidently on. "I'm your wife now, and that's all done with, isn't it, so you can be quite frank, can't you?"

I could be; but the agitating question I had to settle was whether I could afford to be.

"Well?" she added, as I was cataloguing my exhibits.

"You want to know about them all?" I ventured to gain time.

"Oh!" she cried excitedly, "were they all? So many as that!"

"No, no," I hastened to reassure her. "Of course an unmarried man meets a lot of girls; but he can only marry one—at least one at a time."

"But I want to hear about the others."

"The others don't count."

"Of course, they don't count—now," she admitted happily. "But I'd so like to hear about them." She was quite wide awake now. And it was getting on toward morning. There was nothing for me to do but to bring forward some of the nicest samples.

"The first," I began, "was a school-girl."

"I don't want to hear about school-girls," she petulantly said.

Which was lucky for me. "Pass the school-girl," I said, relieved. That particular school-girl had been—but Babette did not care about her. I hurried on.

"There was Mabel——"

"Was she pretty?"

"All of 'em were pretty," I replied.

"You mean, you thought them pretty—then."

"No; they were pretty, but not pretty in the way you are."

"What was she?"

"She was a typist in the same office. I can't have been more than twenty-one. Good figure—rather too good figure. Curvey, convex, plump, you know."

Babette settled her. "Fat!" she said.

"Perhaps; but I think I liked that sort in those days."

"I'm glad I didn't meet you then," said the slim Babette, whose body has been, I believe, specially constructed for the modern dress by a beneficent providence. "Well?"

"One day she asked me if I could fix her typewriting machine. It was just five o'clock, and she had to do an

important letter before she went. And her machine had jammed. I waited behind to help her—she was one of the helpless sort—infantile and appealing, I thought her. All the others had gone. I knew less about typewriters—and other things—than she did. I couldn't find out what was wrong until Mabel bent over me to show me. It appeared that what was wanted was merely the application of my lips to hers."

"Beast!" said Babette. I do not know whether she meant me or Mabel. I thought it better not to find out.

"She kissed me back, of course," I continued. "And I saw her to her 'bus. And next week I took her on the river. I was rather shy, I remember, and very excited and extraordinarily proud. There seemed to be so much of her for a thin young man like me to take care of. And in the boat—we tied it up under some willows—she kissed me—pretty fierce, it was. But, somehow, it frightened me, being made love to, you know. She never came out on the river again with me; and I didn't know whether I was heart-broken or relieved when she left the office for another position. Glad, and yet terribly sorry, you understand. I found out afterwards that she went away to get married to the head clerk in our office. And one of the other clerks told me that he had seen her with him trying to mend her typewriting machine one afternoon after all the others had left. I daresay I was a young fool."

"No," Babette said fiercely, "she was a horrible woman; and you were lucky to get out of her clutches. Why, she might have married you!" She had a moment of contemplation of the dreadful possibility. "Was she dark or fair?"

"Yellow hair. I rather admired yellow hair in those days."

"I suppose all boys do," Babette said comfortably, armoured in her bronze. "Was that all?"

"All with her."

"But the others?"

"Peggy, I think her name was—or was it Polly?" I could not for the moment remember. "No; Polly came later. I met Peggy in a fog. We were out in it one afternoon, and we had both lost our way. She ran into me under a lamp-post, and asked me where she was. And when I made her out, with a kind of halo about her—from that lamp above—I didn't know exactly where I was. I offered to take her home, and somehow we found ourselves in the park. We could not even find a seat. So we sat down in the damp grass, and I made love to her."

"O-oh!" Babette made the noise that you utter when you turn the cold shower on. "And you'd only just met her!"

"But it wasn't in a world of convention that I had met her," I explained. "It didn't seem to be in this world at all. The fog had changed everything, shut out everything."

"Well, and then?" Babette braced herself to get this unexpected tooth pulled.

"That was all. I never saw her again. I often looked for her. She never turned up at the corner where she had promised to meet me the next night. The fog had gone by then—perhaps that was why she didn't come. And I wouldn't have been able to recognise her again. I had forgotten everything about her except her hair and her mouth."

"Go on," Babette whispered desperately.

"Polly." I ticked her off. "Polly was the sweet, clinging sort, like treacle. She used to weep silently and hopelessly. She had great big eyes that looked enchanting with tears in them. She was engaged to a friend of mine, and she was going to keep her sacred promise. She used to come and tell me all her doubts

whether she loved him enough. I used to soothe her with kisses. She was the sort that always wants kisses; and it doesn't matter much where they come from. Oh, she married him all right, but a week before we had a tearful farewell; and a year later she wrote and told me she had made The Great Mistake and would I meet her one night at the old corner? I didn't, because at that time I was interested in a girl on the stage—at least, she had been in a chorus once and wanted to get there again. Maisie, her name was. She told me soon after that she had been married for six months."

I paused. It seemed to me that Babette had had enough for one night. The rest of the catalogue could keep.

"Was that all?" she said.

"As far as I can remember," I replied. "Of course, there was an occasional kiss at a dance, you know, and one, I remember, in the stairway of the Twopenny Tube, about a hundred feet below the street. And on my holidays at the seaside there was the usual assortment of hurried affairs that ended in dribbling letters a few months afterwards."

"But these weren't serious?"

"No; I've forgotten their first names—I never knew their second ones."

"But surely you've had a real affair? All these were mere flirtations, weren't they?"

"There was one," I said slowly. "She really mattered, and she was the most beautiful of the lot. I didn't like to mention her with all the others."

"Oh, but you must!" Babette sat up in bed.

"Well——"

"Go on," she harshly commanded. "Did you—promise——"

Babette clenched her little fist; but she was no coward. She would face it out.

"I married her," I smiled.

I do not know whether Babette was the more relieved or the more disappointed. She had expected revelations. Her curiosity was distinctly hurt. "So that's all?" she said at last.

"It's the story of any average young man's life," I said.

"I am disappointed," Babette said at last. "I thought, from something in your eyes, and the way you used to look at me when we first met, that you had been much worse. All my girl friends told me you were a terribly wicked man. That is really why I took to you at first sight."

I rapidly considered whether I had better tell her about Gertrude . . . or, possibly Lola—especially Lola.

"You see, I wanted to marry a man, not a milksop," my wife said. "I really think you've married me under false pretences. I believe I could get a divorce for that."

But there was a radiance in her eyes that told me she didn't mean it. I carefully covered up Gertrude and the remarkable Lola from sight. They were the sort of exhibits that are not read out in court, but handed up in writing to the judge.

"But you're an old dear," Babette smiled. "I'm not really disappointed; but you've had a rather tame sort of existence. If I were a man I'm sure I'd have something more to confess. But you've liked a lot of girls, anyhow. And they're all a kind of compliment to me. You see, you married me, and you didn't marry the others. And I daresay some of them were much prettier than me."

"Yes," I admitted.

Babette became distinctly annoyed.

"But in a different way," I soothed her. "And I

wouldn't look twice at them now I know how beautiful a woman can be."

Babette was content. "You're a dear old thing," she sighed; "and I don't think you're a milksop at all. How could I—now?"

DIALOGUE TWO

THE TRAGEDY OF BABETTE'S NIGHT-DRESS

"After all, a Woman Wears her Night-dress more Often than she wears any of Her Other Frocks."—*The Babette Birthday Book.*

"O-OH!" Babette the bride gasped, as we snuggled down in the reserved carriage and shook the confetti out of our hair. "I've forgotten my nightie!" Then, tragically, "My wedding nightie!"

It is all very well to make rules about marriage. When you are married you find that marriage makes its own rules—about you. Babette and I, once we had got over the slight awkwardness of feeling really engaged, formulated a very definite programme for our marriage. At least, I suggested the programme, and Babette cordially assented. Looking back on that period, I now see that Babette, in her position—usually on my knee—was apt to assent to anything. It shortened the intervals between kisses.

"Love is blind," I carefully pointed out. "The gravest risk in married life is that the parties are apt to forget that. They cruelly remove Love's blinkers, and naturally Love shies. When people see too much of each other, even when they are safely married——"

"Oh, but," Babette ecstatically cried, "I could never see too much of you, dear. And I thought," she went shyly on, "that marriage meant that you did see quite a lot of the girl you married."

"That's the very danger I'm afraid of—that you'll see too much of me."

"I couldn't," Babette said simply. "And you've got to see a good deal of me, haven't you—sometimes?"

I explained gently that I didn't mean that.

"Oh!" Babette seemed relieved.

"What I mean is that there shouldn't be too many—details," I explained. "You know, keep up the illusion."

"But there isn't any illusion about me. I'm real, aren't I?"

Judging by the impression Babette was making on my knee there was no doubt about that. "But my point is that it isn't necessary for a wife——" I had to interrupt my argument when I said "wife." We always gave each other a kiss when the words "wife" or "husband" were mentioned: it seemed so wonderful that we could use such exciting words.

"It isn't necessary for a wife to give herself away to her husband." (Another interruption.) "All he need see is the effect she gets—not how she gets it."

"But I've got the duckiest undies for my trousseau," Babette earnestly said. "And now they'll—all be wasted."

"Oh, I'd love to see them, darling," I hastened to say. "But that's the very reason why you shouldn't let me. You must remain a mystery even to your husband—(pause)—keep me perpetually wanting to know all about you."

"I could do that," Babette hopefully murmured.

"But you'd spoil it all if you let me."

"That's harder," Babette admitted. "But I don't really see why I shouldn't."

"The books—I've read quite a lot of books about love and marriage."

"All written by silly women who've never even

been kissed, who've never had a baby, and "I don't think have ever been married even once."

"Perhaps; but that's what they all say."

"Well, I'd just like to ask those women who write those silly books what's the good of getting married if we're going to remain comparative strangers."

"Oh, hardly that!" I protested. "But each of us, though married, has the right to our own privacy"

Babette detests general terms. She likes to discuss things, not propositions. "I see," she said, suddenly illuminated, "you mean, I shouldn't see you in your shirt? I should think a man in his shirt looks rather absurd, don't you? It's curious, too, because a girl in her nightie looks rather fetching, don't you think? But of course you don't know anything about that."

I did not contradict Babette. I couldn't.

"But I'd certainly be dreadfully shy," she went softly on, snuggling closer, "if you saw me in my—well, when I was getting undressed. But I suppose even in the best book-regulated marriages that sometimes happens."

The note of shyness in Babette's tone curiously almost suggested a note of hopefulness.

I hastened to reassure her. "It won't happen in our marriage."

"Oh!" she said; and a look of determination appeared on her innocent face. On looking back, I am not sure what that determined look really meant. •

You will see from this verbatim report of one of our many engagement discussions that Babette and I were quite modern. We believed in perfect frankness—with, of course, the necessary reservations—at least, on my part. We had even settled the awkward question whether, when we were married, Babette would really like to have a little pink baby. Being unmarried, I thought then that new babies were really a delicate shade of pink.

Babette answered, with a slight hint of shyness, that she had not given the matter a thought. She was quite prepared just to go on loving me and being a sympathetic wife and cooking my meals and darning my socks . . . but . . . yes . . . since I had raised the question . . . in a few years or so . . . when she'd got accustomed to me. . . .

But, as will have been guessed by the clever reader, our beautiful scheme for married modesty was smashed on our wedding-day. In the rush of changing into her going-away costume from her given-away costume a bride always forgets something. Babette was the first bride in history to forget the most essential necessity for a comfortable honeymoon.

She made a hurried, despairing search in that reserved carriage. The night-dress had not been packed.

"But you've got others?" I hopefully suggested.

"Yes, all packed up for the sea-trip, and left at home till we go."

We had, in our innocence, by sheer luck avoided the worst pitfall of the honeymoon. We weren't going to catch the steamer till three days later. A sea-sick wedding night is the worst catastrophe that can happen to anybody. It is even worse for the one who isn't sea-sick.

We had selected a charmingly secluded boarding-house on the sea-side, miles from anywhere, and even lacking a telephone, to spend the first three days of our honeymoon. And we were even out of reach of night-dresses.

"My wedding nightie!" Babette moaned. "All made of pink bébé-ribbons and—well, that's about all it is made of. It's all your fault!" She broke down. Yes, she wept on her honeymoon. (I didn't know then that all brides do.)

And when she blamed me—exactly why, I forget—

I knew that I was married. The solemn vows we had taken that day, the wedding breakfast, the speeches and the toasts, even the easy manner in which Babette kissed every available young man in the room, had not given me the sense that I was really married to my Babette. But when, beautiful in her tears, she turned on me and put the blame on me, the sudden conviction came that this was the real altar and the real Wedding March. She put the blame on me. That is what a husband is for.

We wired, of course, at the first stopping place; but we knew that there was no chance of the night-dress arriving for at least two days. Two nights! Babette wrote the wire: "Forgot indispensable garment. Send at once." She said her mother would know.

Then I saw another aspect of the case. "It'll put the people at the boarding-house quite off the scent," I said. "A bride arriving without her night-dress! It has never been heard of before. The landlady is sure to find out; and then nobody will suspect us of being honeymooners."

Partly by my argument, partly by other means known to the newly-wed, I cheered Babette up. She agreed that the mystery of the missing night-dress would materially assist us in our deception.

We had been very clever about that. When I wrote asking for the best double-bed room in the house, the landlady had replied stating the terms, and adding: "Children 15s. a week extra."

In deep consultation with Babette I had drafted my letter in reply. I wrote a postscript: "We have decided to leave the two children at home this time; but if we like the place we will bring them on our next visit."

But the cleverness of this manoeuvre was altogether overshadowed by the mystery of the missing night-dress.

The only thing, I reflected, was that this astounding bridal forgetfulness of Babette—for which, now, she blamed the chief bridesmaid—made it much more difficult to preserve the modesty of our married life.

It is curious to reflect that I cannot recollect what sort of night-dress Babette wore that night. She told me the next morning that she had borrowed the best night-dress the landlady had—so I suppose she must have worn a night-dress of some sort. She also told me that luckily she had brought some pinky ribbons, and had managed with their assistance to make that garment almost bridal. She had also improved the “V.” I cannot recall either the pinkiness of the ribbons or the improved “V.”

It was very awkward, too, to preserve our personal privacy in the one double-bed room we had engaged. But we did it, heroically. In the evening Babette, on some innocent pretext, slipped away . . . and did not come back. When I went for her, she was in bed. She hurriedly turned her back on me and buried her nose in the bed-clothes. And in the morning I rushed down for a bathe, and on my return was met by Babette in a new frock.

The only unfortunate incident of our brief stay occurred when we were leaving. We had heroically kept up the deception that we were an old married couple. We had spoken anxiously of the two children, left in the kind care of Babette’s aunt. We wondered if they missed their “inummy” and their “daddie.” And when we were saying good-bye the landlady had cheerfully remarked, with a smile for the assembled boarders, “I do hope you’ll bring both the children next year. And I hope, we all hope, that before then you’ll have decided upon the sex of your two children. It’s so confusing to strangers when the mother speaks of her two darling little girls, and the father says that the elder is a boy.”

TRAGEDY OF BABETTE'S NIGHT-DRESS 27

"There!" Babette said, as we drove away covered with public ignominy, "that comes of letting a man interfere about children. It was pretty lucky for you, too, that I was with you when you explained that there was only five months' difference in the ages of the children. I explained that you meant a year and five months. But . . . it *would* be a nice place for the—the children, don't you think?"

But it was when we took the steamer for the real honeymoon that our great marriage ideal was smashed. Babette had recovered her wedding night-dress, and even wore it; but she was a wretched sailor and sick all the way. Every morning, though she could keep nothing down, though I had based great hopes on the smallness of her waist, she struggled to her bath, was sick in it, and in the afternoon made an heroic effort to go on deck, and was sick on it.

When it comes to promiscuity, two bunks in a state-room are worse than a double bed. I had to constitute myself Babette's nurse. I had to lift her from her bunk, steady her to the couch, brush her hair, wash her face, button and tie and hook and safety her up. I had to find the most unmentionable of garments beneath a foam of other garments almost as unmentionable in her cabin trunk. I had to take clumsy lessons in the putting on of corsets and the fastening of suspenders to stockings. I had to——

Yes; privacy in married life is an exalted ideal; but it doesn't remain an ideal long when your bride is seasick.

And Babette and I now agree that, after all, it's much cosier the way it is.

DIALOGUE THREE

THE WEDDING-NIGHT DIALOGUE

"Every Woman is At Heart a Babette."—*The Babette Birthday Book.*

GETTING married is an awkward business, especially when one is a beginner. And it is infinitely worse when both parties are beginners. It has always seemed to me a pity that nobody has thought of compiling a Handbook For the Honeymoon, telling you what to do in the vestry, offering you the choice of several felicitous speeches that you could learn by heart for responding to the toast of the health of the bride, and laying down the etiquette of the reserved compartment of the train. All these things are important—a mistake in the etiquette of the wedding day might mar two life-long happinesses. It is my bashful hope that these truthful records of my married life might form the basis of such a honeymoon handbook.

But for me, in my wedding-day experiences, there was no handbook. I am a diffident man. I find it difficult to chat. I can argue well enough—at least, I could before I married Babette, and then I found it was no use to argue. I can even converse; but I can't chat. And on one's wedding day there are awkward intervals when it is necessary to chat. They take so long marrying you nowadays that at times you don't quite know whether you are married or not. You would think that when the parson has finished you off

you are married; but obviously you are not, else why should you have to sign documents in the vestry? You would think that when you were in the motor, on your way to the residence of the bride's parents for the purpose of the dreadfully long-drawn-out wedding breakfast, in that happy seclusion of the motor, you would think you were man and wife. But Babette, my just-made wife, informed me that I wasn't—yet. You would think that in the reserved compartment of the train, with a long journey before you, you were obviously married. But you aren't. At least, I wasn't. You would think that on arrival at your destination, after dinner, you were a married couple; but Babette and I weren't. This state of horrible uncertainty is very awkward. It is obvious that the conversation that a man can have with his fiancée is not the conversation that is permitted to a bride—that the topics suitable to a bride have not the range of the topics possible with a wife.

It was quite easy for me to talk to Babette when we first met. And though I found it difficult to propose, you will discover that Babette herself helped me all she could, by doing it herself. And, once engaged, there was no difficulty in keeping Babette entertained for hours, except the habit my leg had of going to sleep just when she was getting comfortable on my knee. If there were occasional embarrassing intervals of silence Babette and I amply filled them by putting our lips to other and more delectable uses. But as my wedding day inexorably approached, I began to wonder just what I could talk about to her in the intervals of that dragging and spread-out ceremony. Especially what I could talk about in the interval between dinner and the hour for retiring.

Neither of us had had any useful hints. Bernard Shaw was no use. His "Getting Married" is wrongly

titled. His characters are not getting married; they are talking about it. They are going to get married, not getting married. And in the many useful books upon marriage, usually entitled "The Young Husband" or "The Young Wife," the topic of suitable conversations between the partially wedded is not even mentioned. By the way, I found out after our marriage permitted Babette and her husband to mention these subjects, treated so devoutly and so discreetly in these publications, that Babette had never read "The Young Wife," which I knew by heart, while she admitted that she had carefully studied "The Young Husband," of which, up to that moment, I had never heard. And though we each politely offered to lend the other our handbooks, neither of us thought it worth while to look at them.

The convention of the fiction-writers is that the bachelor's wedding eve is a most hilarious one. Mine wasn't. I doubt if any bachelor's ever is. I did have the usual bachelor's supper with my friends. There was plenty of hilarity, it is true, but it wasn't mine. They could afford to be hilarious; they weren't going to be married. They drank my wife's health and my health; and this sudden solicitude about our healths worried me. Hang it all! I was only going to get married. That supper seemed to me like the last breakfast of the condemned criminal. He is allowed to eat and drink what he likes, happy in the conviction that, provided the hangman is punctual, the pangs of indigestion will never trouble him, sure that he won't wake up with the "morning after" feeling. But I knew that I'd have both the indigestion and the "morning after."

"It'll be all the same, old chap," my best chum said. "I'll drop round and see you in your new digs, and I'll expect you to look me up as usual—and tell me how it

feels to be married. I might want to do the same thing myself, some day, you know."

(He dropped round once—and dropped out. Babette said he wasn't a bad sort of man, but too bachelorish. She thought his influence on me might be upsetting. And though I dropped round to look him up, Babette, my wife, insisted on dropping with me; and the yarns he told would have proved innocuous in a nursery. Even Babette complained. I had told her some of his best—made in my bachelor days.)

So my bachelor friends drank the last toast and solemnly in turn shook my hand. I went home to my desolate lodging-house and brooded in my bedroom. I had always hated my lodgings; but to-night I loved them. I could do what I liked in that safe haven. I could go to bed when I liked, I could smoke when I liked; I hadn't to consider anybody about anything. Nobody interfered. But to-morrow my life would be dreadfully complicated. By Babette. I would have to ask her permission to smoke, I would have to consider her wishes even about going to bed. No wonder that in my bedroom I brooded. To-morrow night I wouldn't even be allowed to brood.

No; I didn't spend the time in burning bundles of love-letters. I hadn't any bundles to burn, except Babette's—and that would be sacrilege. Love-letters are dangerous explosives to leave about at any time; and quite early in life I discovered that the sooner they were destroyed the safer one felt. A girl will put things in her letters that she would never dream of whispering—things that if read out in court. . . . Fortunately they aren't read out in court; they are passed up to the judge and then gingerly handed round to the jury.

So I went miserably to bed, but not to sleep. I wondered if Babette was asleep; and the picture of the delicious Babette in the sort of night-dress I imagined

Babette would wear was the last thing I wanted to think about if I was going to get any sleep. However, I managed to dismiss Babette in her night-dress from my mind; and I woke at dawn with the usual "morning after" feeling. And the trouble hadn't even begun. It was a long, dreary morning, followed by a condemned criminal's lunch with my best man. He was horribly attentive, he compelled me to eat, and advised me to keep my strength up so persistently that it seemed to me that he was my warder, anxious that his prisoner should make a good appearance on the scaffold.

"Confound you!" I growled, as he shepherded me into the taxi, "don't guard me! Don't watch me! I give you my word I won't try to escape. I know it's no use now. I've got to go through with it now. But I won't wear handcuffs and I won't have a handkerchief over my eyes."

But my best man merely smiled encouragingly. "That's the way to take it," he said. "Keep it up, anyhow till after the church. The worst will be over by then."

But the fool didn't know that the worst would be only beginning by then. And he shepherded me all the way to the church and up the awful aisle. If there is any torture more horribly lingering than the waiting at the top of the church with one's back to a crowd of fashionably-dressed grand inquisitors, while one thinks of Babette's notorious forgetfulness and unpunctuality, and her habit of dropping things, I'd like to know it—for use on the Church of England.

I waited there, my back to the foe, unable even to look behind me. It seemed ages. But at last there was a stir and a murmur behind me, and I felt, through my tingling back, the tremendous arrival of Babette the bride. Then I grew conscious of something in white at my side, something frosted and iced over, something

snowy and glacial and refrigerated, utterly unlike my Babette. Then I understood that the melodramas were, after all, not melodramatic. "Married to the Wrong Woman" was absolutely true to life. I was in the process of being married to the wrong woman. That iced, frozen thing at my side—I was already feeling frostbitten in my left foot (or perhaps my new boot was too tight)—was not the Babette who had so modestly asked me to be her husband, that was not the Babette whose curves seemed made to fit into the embrace of my right arm; that wasn't the audacious, human, melting, confiding Babette who—well, it wasn't that Babette.

Then a worse conviction came. It wasn't Babette at all. I had to look at this strange woman. All I saw was an infinitely virginal, remote, shy, spinsterish, unkissable thing, glittering and frosted like a bridal cake. Ice, not woman. A pale, pale face, without even a glimpse of her eyes to reassure me that she was alive. I shuddered. If she was like this now; quite early in the afternoon, what would she be like . . . later? And how—this was the awful thought—how could any decent man, even though nominally he was her husband, suggest to such glittering purity, such frosted stainlessness, the possibility of—well, say, going to bed?

But fast on this conviction came another, with another shudder. Again, I remembered the melodramas. Wasn't it a habit in them for marriages to be interrupted at the last moment? What if there were somebody, there, in the unseen audience behind my back, who would interfere, who perhaps had a right to interfere? Hurriedly I tried to remember whether I had left everything in my bachelor life securely locked up? Had I been quite definite when I told Alice that "all was over"? Had Sara absolved me from blame over her affair? Had I parted really friends with Essie? Could

I trust Maudie—Maudie who had always trusted me? What was there to prevent Ella from being nasty?—and Ella could be quite nasty when she liked. Suppose Grace publicly disgraced me? And why couldn't I have been quite frank with Jean when I told her I was going away for a year, and hoped that she would always treasure my memory? And why—oh, why did I kiss Stella so much and so often when I told her that I was too hard up to marry for years yet, and couldn't honourably keep her waiting any longer for a rotter like me? And when I announced to Prudence my engagement to Babette—and not a moment too soon—why was I weak enough to put in my letter that passionate postscript? I thought it would cheer her up; but suppose she were to thrust that postscript beneath the parson's nose? If Prudence were as imprudent at my marriage as she invariably was before it? And why——?

There were, you see, plenty of reasons for my fears. And the marriage service had wantonly provided for "scenes." There is an irrelevant remark in that service about anybody knowing any just cause or impediment—and I had carelessly left such a lot of these causes and impediments about—that seemed to me simply inviting trouble. You would expect a marriage service to have more sense.

What made matters worse was that the clergyman, instead of slurring over this part of the ceremony, declaimed his invitation for the just causes and impediments to step this way as if he really expected that somebody would produce the just causes. And after his invitation he dramatically paused.

In that solemn hush I heard footsteps! They were coming, quite distinctly, up the aisle. I dared not look round. The footsteps came nearer and nearer.

The frosted bridal cake at my side shuddered closer to me, and I felt the grateful warmth of her thawing

fingers in mine. Babette clutched me, almost clung to me. *

The footsteps that still came nearer were not the dainty tap-tapping of feminine heels. They were the harsh footsteps of a man:

I was saved! But Babette? I understood why she had so unexpectedly thawed. Some man dared to say he was a just cause or impediment to my marrying Babette! I'd let him see. I'd marry Babette if there were a dozen impediments armed with breaches of promise writs or axes. For it was my warm Babette, and not an iceberg, that I was marrying now. Grasping Babette's hand, I waited proudly for the impediment in the big boots.

It never came. The steps stopped. Silence. And the clergyman, disappointed, hurried over the rest of the service.

"Did you hear those awful footsteps?" Babette gasped as soon as we reached the vestry. Her first words as a wife! "I got such a fright. I thought of—oh, all sorts of men who might think I had given them cause. And do you know who it was? Just Uncle James. He was late, just arrived in that silence, and as he's deaf he didn't know the noise he was making. So he tramped solemnly up to the front seats."

"I'll thank him," I said gratefully, "for thawing you. Do you know you were an iceberg up till then?"

"How could I help being an iceberg, when you stood there like the North Pole all the time and never even looked at me? But Uncle James did give me a scare. It might have been—men are so stupid about things like engagements, aren't they? They never admit that their own affairs are definitely off, even when a girl shows them the ring. And I promised so many of them that—oh, a girl is very foolish in the things she says to

a man when he's kissed her, isn't she? But, thank goodness, I'm married now."

I thanked goodness, too. Babette was so adorably thawed now that I wondered if it would be possible to put the windows of the car up on our drive to the house.

"So it's over!" I sighed, as we settled down in the car and the driver started.

"Over!" Babette smiled. "Why, darling husband, it's just begun. First lap. There's all the wedding breakfast to go through, and the speeches, and the changing into my going-away dress and the train journey, and——" Babette hastily broke off, blushing. She wasn't quite sure how much she was married yet.

"Quite a lot to come yet," I said cheerfully.

"It's all very exciting," Babette sighed happily, "but it's so long-drawn-out. I believe I'd have liked the old way, where a man just collared his girl and then they were married—all at once, as it were."

"Anyhow," I said, "I'm not going to wait." And I bent over to kiss Babette, my wife.

Ever tried to kiss a bride in her bridal armour-plate? Don't. I didn't.

"You'll crush me!" she cried.

"I mean to!"

"You mustn't. Everybody would know."

"But——" I protested.

"Can't you wait, then?" Babette looked up at me with her first married look, quite adorably shameless.

I decided to wait. But that fleeting moment of intimacy was the only one vouchsafed me throughout the afternoon of my wedding day. Legally, Babette was my wife—and everyone of her male friends of her immediate past kissed her in public. And Babette revelled in these public caresses, Babette, my wife! Except at the wedding breakfast, where we had to sit

handcuffed and listen to old friends of the family blurting out facts of Babette's babyhood, and other old friends making the sort of joke that can only be made at a wedding without the interference of the police, Babette and her husband hardly saw each other. But I did catch a glimpse of her just before our taxi left.

Of course, Babette was slow over changing into her going-away dress. Twice I called out to the closed door of her bedroom that she must hurry. There was so much conversation going on within that I was unheard. At last I knocked and went in. Babette, the beautiful, was being dressed, or undressed, by half a dozen of her adoring girl-friends. Babette's under-things—I didn't know their names then—were so wonderful that her friends were admiring them rather than helping her. She stood in a state of undress nearly as nude as when dressed for a ball. And nobody was in the least shocked at my intrusion. You see, I was her husband. It was the first time that I had really felt that I was her husband.

We caught our train by the usual honeymoon miracle. And, if my readers remember "The Tragedy of Babette's Night-dress," they will know that in the reserved carriage there was one fertile topic of conversation. But I could not help wondering what I could talk about after dinner.

Luckily, after the boarding-house dinner, we found a secluded seat on the verandah. At least, I did. I had glanced at my watch as we left the table. It was only half-past seven. We had all the night before us, three solid hours before bedtime. What was I going to talk about in that interval? Why hadn't I decided on some place less accessible, some lonely spot that we would reach only by eleven o'clock, and then have to go straight to bed? Of course, I filled in a large portion of the time by cuddling Babette. But,

curiously, I did not get the old-remembered pleasure out of kissing her.

"Isn't it rather silly, darling," Babette shyly laughed, "now that we are married?"

It was true. She was my wife now, all mine. "Stolen kisses are sweetest; and there was no need now to steal them any more. Always before I had the happy sense of something in Babette's heart hidden from me, something of her affection forbidden. And now the temptation of Babette had disappeared. We were man and wife. It sounded rather dull.

"So we're married!" Babette happily sighed. "And it doesn't seem the least bit different, does it?"

"It's been a tiring day for you, dearest," I said. "I mustn't keep you up late, you know."

"Oh, but I'm not feeling the least bit tired," Babette quickly said. "I could sit on your knee all night."

I had to be brutal. "Not to-night, Babette, I'm rather tired myself. A good sound sleep would put you right again."

Babette considered this gravely, but she made no move off my knee. So we discussed the missing night-dress, for a while, and for another period we sat, cheek to cheek, listening to the moan of the waves, and just thinking. At least, I was. Then my right knee went to sleep, and then Babette nearly did. She ended one of her kisses with a yawn.

We sat up. "Dearest," I said with a fatherly solicitude, "don't you think you are too tired to——?"

"To go for a stroll on the beach? Not in the least. Come on."

"I'm sorry, sweetheart, but I'm too weary even for a stroll," I answered bravely. "But if you'd like to try the other knee——?"

She did, and we sat and listened and thought some more. Then Babette yawned again.

"Babette!" I said sharply, "you're half asleep! It's quite time all good little wives were safely in bed. You need a sound, refreshing sleep."

"Why, what time is it?"

I looked at my watch. A quarter-past eight. Two hours more! I sincerely wished I felt the least bit sleepy. But I didn't. I decided on a cigarette, first, since I was married, asking my wife's permission. But my cigarette case was empty.

"I forgot to fill it," I said. "But I've got plenty of cigarettes packed up." And I gently removed Babette from my knee.

"No; I'll get them for you," she said. "I must start some time being the dutiful wife. Wait here."

She flitted away before I could stop her. After all, there were compensations in being married. I waited. I kept on waiting. Surely Babette couldn't have missed the cigarettes. I packed them myself. Or had I forgotten to pack them? Well, Babette would soon be back. But she wasn't. I began to get a little anxious. She'd been gone half an hour. I made my way to my bedroom door—our bedroom door. It seemed strange for me to knock at my own bedroom door.

A tiny, fluttered voice whispered, "Is that you, husband?"

I reassured her.

"Come in, husband!"

The light was low, just a discreet glimmer. Babette was not searching in my suit-case. She was lying on the bed. Was she ill? I hurried to her side. No; she wasn't lying on the bed. She was in bed. Right on the far side of the double bed.

"I felt a little tired, darling," she whispered, "so I just tumbled into bed. I'm sorry I didn't bring you your cigarettes. They're on the dressing table. Don't smoke too many, dearest, will you? And you don't

mind me leaving you all on your lonesome, do you?
I'm feeling so sleepy. Good-night, old boy ! ”

She turned over on her side, and snuggled cosily down
—to sleep.

I forget what we talked about the rest of that night.

DIALOGUE FOUR

THE FIRST QUARREL

"The only way to Account for The Average Husband is The Average Wife."—*The Babette Birthday Book*.

It all happened because I forgot to kiss Babette on the nape of the neck. She has an adorable and eminently kissable nape; and, though I necessarily have had a limited opportunity of comparing and classifying women's napes—I can conceive of no more delightful and useful profession—I am inclined to declare that the nape of Babette is the most beautiful in the world. Perhaps this is because I discovered Babette's nape by myself, unaided. Before I triumphantly announced my discovery to her, she had been quite unaware that she possessed a nape at all. Thus I have, as it were, unalienable rights of possession to my discovery.

Of course I have no excuse for omitting to kiss her nape. It was there, waiting to be kissed. But for my otherwise inexplicable omission the only thing I can blame is Babette's evening dress. Babette, in addition to being my wife, is, it might be mentioned, a woman. And, despite the fact that she has been my wife for three months, she persists in remaining a woman. Hence every dress of hers is, with one exception, buttoned or hooked or tied or pinned at the back. The one exception in her trousseau was her night-dress, which, as far as I could discover, did not button or hook or tie or pin up or down anywhere. She just flowed into it somehow.

But the rest of Babette's attire needed more putting on than that. In fact, dressing with her was more in the nature of a cataclysm or a building operation, triumphantly conducted under a series of harassing and intricate municipal by-laws. But she was not the architect of her own fashionable loveliness. It is true that she laid the foundations of her fortune herself. To begin with, she had a figure that could be, as it were, comfortably poured into the shapes demanded by each succeeding fashion. How she managed it it is not my province to tell; but if certain gentlemen in Paris suddenly decreed that every woman in the world should dispense with hips, within a month Babette was hipless. And if those interfering Parisian males ukased straight fronts, Babette's curves straightway became straight.

And on this plastic foundation—or would it be more accurate to term it plasticene?—she built up, layer by layer, the diaphanous swathings necessary. Mere brickwork, this—foundation stones of silk and open-work and lace, ready for the reinforced concrete of corsets, bracing the beautiful edifice with a multitude of tapes and elastic bands. But the final coat of paint, the final surface ornament, was left for me.

She would call me when she was ready—usually when I was in the midst of that tremendous struggle with my tie. I would find her in front of the glass, with a strained look and the preliminary layer of powder on her face. She would indicate the gap in her back, through which I could discern the lovely nape treated of in this chapter, the foam of the surface of her ship bodice, and, lower down, a barricade of intricate tapes.

"Begin at the top," she would command. "There's a hook—or there ought to be—somewhere hidden among the lace. See that you get the right hook, so that the

trimming meets, and go right down. The lining first, of course. Don't touch anything but the lining till you've got that done. And be quick. We've only got half an hour, and I've got to powder my neck yet."

A man's fingers are not built to manipulate microscopic hooks. He is not naturally clumsy; but there is no purchase in hooks that must be strained to hidden eyes. The task is difficult enough if you are dealing with a stationary figure; but you are dealing with a woman. It is like trying to thread a needle in a sewing-machine going at full speed. And Babette insists on me hooking her up in darkness. No matter how often I place her back to the light, with the light coming from behind my left shoulder, she manages to wriggle round. She explains that she wants to see how she looks, but she had been doing that for the past hour.

And there are so many hooks. Usually I get twenty-three hooks securely fastened before I discover that there is one hook that hasn't any discoverable eye. I announce this startling discovery to Babette, and she exasperatedly bids me look for a missing hook up at the top. Then I have to unhook twenty-three hooks and begin again.

But it is as I approach Babette's equator that I brace myself. She is adorably slim; but no woman is nowadays built slim enough for the waist she wants. Babette helps; she holds her breath for a full minute—and no modern woman is patient enough to stand that torture without damage to her temper. Not that Babette has a temper except at crises such as these.

So I manage clumsily and methodically to get the lining braced tight, and, with a confusing series of instructions, I somehow get the rest of the dress, flimsy stuff that seems too delicate to handle, adequately hooked. Then comes my final degradation. I have to

put in the last pin. I have never understood the need of that final pin. You would think that somewhere in the world some super-woman of a dressmaker would anticipate the need of that final pin and put a hook and eye there. But none of Babette's dressmakers have had that bright idea.

It is at moments such as these that I wildly invent a dress that will fix up at the back by a single turn of a small Yale key. All you would have to do would be to bring the gaping parts together, insert the key and snap the lock. I suggested this idea to Babette once while I was hooking her; but I've decided not to mention it to her again.

Well, I get her hooked up somehow; and it takes her all the journey to the theatre before she forgives me.

This crisis occurred quite early in our honeymoon. I believe it happens in every honeymoon. And it keeps on happening all through married life. And the percentage of unhappy marriages, they say, is steadily rising.

But the unhooking of your wife is the grimmest test of marital courage. You are tired. The material you work on is tired. Your fingers, scarcely recovered from their earliest task, are quite unfitted for delicate operations now. Again you must begin at the top and usually there is in Babette's evening dresses a tiny thread that mercifully keeps Babette from plumping out of her dress altogether. It is hidden away, tucked down her back. It has to be fished up and carefully untied. And there are seven pins where you distinctly remember putting only one. And five more in quite unexpected places. And, probably because it is after her supper, the unhooking of the king pin at her waist is a task that requires physical strength allied with deftness never met with in the human race, except in the rare case of happily married males.

But, as at last Babette gives her body that animal

wriggle to make sure that no hook still holds, there is the benediction to be pronounced on a good work done. This is the soothing ceremony of kissing Babette's perfect nape. The first time I had the inspiration to do it she was surprised and delighted; every time I do it she is surprised and delighted. Unfortunately this evening, in sucking my thumb from a hook that had meanly reared itself on end and stabbed me, I forgot her nape. I had not bestowed a thought upon her nape, though it was staring me in the face, from the moment that her waist had leapt open.

Of course, Babette did not remind me. No wife ever does—at least, just then. She has to work up to it, to think hard of all the other times when her husband has shamefully neglected her, to arrange the list of his omissions in order, and to work up a sulk sufficiently sulky to make him sit up and take notice. This does not always result. Many a misunderstood wife has gone to infinite trouble to produce a sulk; and her husband hasn't even noticed that she was any different, simply because he was speculating on the chances of Grey Prince for the Cup.

This night, after we had got into bed, it gradually dawned on me that Babette was, for her, extraordinarily monosyllabic. But I sleepily put it down to the possibility that she was sleepy, too, and comfortably lay silent, hoping that soon her monosyllables would lengthen into snores. I had not neglected to say good-night. Certainly it was a perfunctory and unimpressive one—honeymoons won't last for ever—and suggested putting out the light.

She had been waiting for this. "Didn't you forget something to-night?" she quietly asked.

I thought of the back door—yes, I remembered locking that; and the hall gas—that was certainly out. I was too sleepy to think of the cat.

"What?" I yawned.

"When you unhooked my dress."

"Did I leave a pin sticking into you?" I anxiously asked. "I am certain I only stuck in three, and I pulled out twelve. Did I miss one, after all?"

"You missed me," she mournfully said.

I remembered, and suddenly was wide awake. I knew it would be an all-night sitting. "Never kissed your nape? By Jove, no more I did! Meant to; but you were in such a hurry and such a wriggle, and there were so many pins, and they had so many points——"

"There now!" cried Babette. "It's no use trying to put the blame on me. Just like a man! I've been waiting all this time to hear your explanation—your apology. You'd clean forgotten it. There's no excuse. There was my neck, and I was helpless—and you didn't kiss me. Henry!" her voice was tragic—and I love it like that. "Henry, you simply don't love me any more!"

"Babettekins!" I cried in my anguish, "you can't mean that?"

"You're beginning to tire of me," she mournfully insisted.

"Absurd!" I said, beginning to get rather frightened.

"Just because I didn't do a little thing like that!"

Babette sat up in bed, looking like Venus rising from the foam of her night-dress. "Henry," she said gravely and sorrowfully with a wounded sadness in her eyes, "it's just because it was such a little thing that I know. It's just the little trivial things that count. It has set me thinking, and looking back. This is the beginning of your disillusionment. You do not care for me—not in the way you used to care. I always knew you idealised me, and I've always been afraid, even on our wedding day, that you'd find out. I used to hide that switch, and I made up my mind never to let you see my feet."

Babette's feet are charming feet, as women's feet go. She has always worn tight shoes; and tight shoes have taken their invariable revenge. Her little toes are twisted and curled, like parsley, and there are three corns on her right parsley-leaf and two, but larger, on her left. In her shoes she looks charming—but underneath she is bulbous. I wonder how many husbands have ever seen their wives' feet?

Babette was near to tears. There is only one thing to do when a man's wife is near to tears. I sat up to do it. My wife wouldn't allow me to kiss her!

Crisis!

"I knew you would do that," she gloomed miserably. "You think I'm a weak woman. You men think that everything is made all right at once by a kiss. No. Nothing—nothing you may do will wipe away the memory of the kiss you forgot to give me on my neck! That will always remain like a scar on my soul. I shall always feel there is something wrong with my neck. Not that it matters in itself," she went miserably on. "I was disappointed, of course—not that I wanted it, but because I thought you liked me enough to want to kiss me anywhere and any time you got the chance. And you had all my neck and shoulders, too! No; it's a warning to me. You're losing interest in me. I suppose all wives find that out. But I thought you would be different—indeed, you promised, solemnly promised, that you would be. And now—you're just like the rest of husbands!"

"Let me explain!" I began, not that I had anything to explain; but if I let her go on she would work herself up, and the discussion would go on till breakfast-time.

"It's no use, Henry," she sadly said. "Nothing could explain that kiss away. It's only another sign. Once when you came home from the office you took

off your goloshes before you kissed me. And last Thursday week, when you were running for your motor-bus at the corner, you forgot to wave your umbrella to me, though you knew I was watching for it at the window."

"Last Thursday week?" I wondered. "I can't remember that day at all."

"It was raining hard, teeming."

"And you expected that I would stop in the pouring rain and whirl my umbrella in the wet and get the rain down my neck, just because you were standing comfortably in a warm room, watching me splash through the mud!"

I was angry with Babette, and yet delighted. She had unconsciously given me a chance to defend an action of mine—a thing I could not do about the omitted kiss. If I could only be sufficiently indignant about this charge she might forget all about her neck.

But she had the superb suburban strategy of all wives. She abandoned details. She advanced her battalions to the attack by a general charge. "There," she exclaimed, "I knew you'd revile me. That only shows that you wouldn't care if you never kissed me again—until, perhaps, you kissed me in my coffin!"

That was so unfair that I told her angrily that I hadn't the least desire to kiss her as long as she said things like that.

And then I had an inspiration. It was only a chance shot, but I decided to fire it. "And about that kiss on the nape," I said. "I'm sure you didn't remember that I hadn't kissed you till you got into bed."

"Oh!" she said angrily—so angrily that I knew I had hurt her unfairly. "How could you think such a thing? What must you think of me to say a thing like that! It just shows me how little you care for me. Oh, I was warned—everybody warned me," she wailed.

Heart-stricken I listened to her sobbing. It was the first time that I had heard my wife really settle back and tackle the job of sobbing. Afterwards, of course, I got used to it. But now it seemed to me as if the end of the world had come, as if all that was left of our lives was being steadily and ruthlessly submerged beneath those streaming tears. I felt like Noah as he looked out from the ark and contemplated his drowned rain-gauge.

Desperately I attempted to take her in my arms—a difficult enough job when both parties are sitting up in bed, and now unutterably complicated by Babette's wet and crumpled appearance. She shook me sadly, moistly off. I spoke endearments to her, called her by all the silly pet names of the honeymoon. She merely wept the more desolately. If only she would interrupt those shaking sobs to say something more intelligible!

"Speak!" I cried. "Say something—anything!"

"Ge-ge-ge-get me a handkerchief!" she wailed. "A big one. One of yours."

I climbed out of bed, glad to do anything, and grabbed a couple of my best handkerchiefs. Babette absently absorbed them.

Then I spoke to her—she would let me touch her now. I apologised, I grovelled, I lied, abjectly I swore that I had never loved, nor would I ever love, any woman as much as her. All of no avail. A woman's tears must run their course. So I relapsed into silence; and at last, listening intently, I heard her sobs subside into sniffs.

There is something solemn in sobs; but every wife knows there is no tragedy in sniffs. Babette had sufficient sense to recognise that I was getting critical.

Weakly, in the voice of a sleepy, miserable child, she said, "Henry . . . I forgot, too!"

"No!" I insisted, almost hating her for her collapse.

"I didn't notice you hadn't kissed my neck till after I got into bed. But I knew there was something worrying me——"

"Subconsciously," I put in.

"Yes," she said gratefully. "I felt it in me. I thought of all the things I might have forgotten, but I couldn't remember what it was. And then I remembered, and it came over me that this was a sign that we were drifting apart. To think that you could forget to kiss me, and me forget that you didn't! That was the terrible thing. Of course, you were to blame. If you had kissed me I wouldn't have had all that worry."

"And all this quarrel——" I began indignantly.

"It was because you had made me feel so ashamed of myself. I simply had to blame somebody—any woman would."

"Babette," I said, sternly, "I am going to kiss you now—right on the nape—five hundred and fifty-nine times. You count!"

"No," she said pleadingly. "I know why you are going to do that. Because you think you ought to—not because you really want to. You think it will please me and put me in a good temper. You think I'm just a woman, and that all a woman wants is to be kissed. Never kiss me because you feel it's the right thing to do, Henry. I'd simply hate you if I thought you were only going to do it to please me. I don't want that sort of a kiss. It would be an insult to me."

"But I want to, want to, want to!" I exclaimed. "My dear Babette, if you could only see your neck as it shows now from the lace of your nightie, you'd understand that I can't help kissing it. No man could."

"Really and truly?" she wanly smiled.

In a speech of ten minutes' duration I convinced her. There was not much credit to me, however, in that.

She was tired out, and in that comfortable, penitent mood that comes to every woman after the relief of a real good cry. She wanted to be nursed and petted and comforted.

She was sound asleep by the forty-third kiss.

DIALOGUE FIVE

SINGLE BEDS

"No Man ever marries One Woman: he marries An Executive Committee of Her Girl Friends, with His Mother-in-Law in the Chair."—*The Babette Birthday Book*.

WOMAN is the cuddling sex. Babette is a woman. When she was a girl, she told me, she hated to sleep by herself. The one need of her soul, as far back as she could remember, was something to cuddle. For a while a doll sufficed, but there came a time when she unconsciously sought something larger and warmer. She found it in an elder sister. Every night she went to sleep happily and comfortably entwined in her sister's arms. To a man this would seem to be impossible; but there is a softness in a woman's curves that seem specially adapted for the art of comfortable cuddling.

In Babette's innocent young dreams marriage was merely a state in which you substituted for a plump and cosy sister a large, strange man.

But the male is not built that way. I shall never forget the relief, the pride, the happiness of my boyhood on the night when I was promoted to a separate bed. And as I grew up, on the few occasions when circumstances have compelled me to share a bed with another man, I passed an uncomfortable night. Bed, to me, was a place where I could enjoy the luxury of escaping contact with humanity. I wake easily, and I have got into the bad habit of reading myself to sleep.

In my few sane intervals during my engagement I reluctantly pondered this aspect of marriage. Marriage meant a double bed. It meant that I could not stretch without the possibility of waking Babette, that I would have to turn over cautiously, that I would have to put out the light when she, and not when I, was sleepy. But those sane intervals were few and brief, and the conviction returned to me that when I was married to Babette I never would be sleepy. Nor would Babette.

Of course, during the first few months the novelty of dropping off to sleep with a slim, warm, soft arm under my neck and a plait of beautiful hair in my mouth sufficed me. And the contact with Babette was not in the least unpleasant. And though I occasionally got a crick in my neck and a mouthful of nice hair, and woke in the middle of the night to find that Babette had stolen all the blankets and had pushed me to the extreme edge of the big double bed, these were nothing compared with the delight of—(See above.)

But Babette snores. And in the summer even the contact with her softness—there was so much of her softness—was a little uncomfortable. Babette, being of the cuddling sex, never noticed it, or liked it; and if I had mentioned it, she would have scornfully reminded me that she took two baths a day, and that I took only one. And in the winter, though in a way her physical abundance acts as a pleasant radiator, Babette has cold, cold feet. And there is a delightful unconsciousness in the way she uses me as a hot-water bottle.

After those first few months of honeymoon I began to brood. When furnishing the house she had come bravely to help me to choose the double bed; but from her practical remarks during the selection no one would have suspected that this was the first double bed that

she had chosen. She had the delightful air of lumping the double bed with the rest of the furniture of the whole house. It was merely a double bed, that was all. The salesman was, I am sure, impressed. But after helping her to choose the two next things on our list, the wedding ring and the garbage-tin—both equally indispensable for a happy married life—and sending her off to inspect gas stoves, I slunk back to the furniture house and surreptitiously ordered a little single bed for my dressing-room.

“What on earth is that thing for?” Babette cried, when the men were unpacking it.

I explained. “You know, we may have a visitor—a girl friend of yours may have to be put up for a night some time, and we must have another bed.”

“I see,” she exclaimed radiantly. “Now there needn’t be any trouble in asking mother down to stay.”

I left it at that, but suggested that, until we got the spare room properly fitted up—we never did; it was always the one room in the house that was kept locked, for Babette did her sewing in it, and occasionally was known to tidy it—we might as well leave the single bed in my dressing-room. So there it was, with no sheets, but a nice coverlet that Babette bought out of her own household linen money.

And now I often looked longingly at it. I had insisted on it being of a man’s, and not of a woman’s, length, with six inches extra at the bottom. It is astonishing how short the average bed is made. This is probably due to a generous impulse on the part of the manufacturers to compensate women for the height of tram-car steps and the height of the average park seat and tram seat. Even the ordinary chair leaves 48 per cent. of female legs desolately dangling. And in shops some malignant devil has provided chairs so high that the tired female shopper can only lean against

them. But then woman is fortunately so built that she can quite easily lean against a high chair without any possibility that she will slip off. Still, it isn't fair on woman to take advantage of her hips.

One night, on coming to bed, I found Babette asleep. This did not often happen, because when she had gone up to undress, and I had settled down for a quiet read in my big comfortable chair—my only chance of occupying it during the evening—she would hover on top of the stairs in her night-dress and gently call:

"Aren't you coming up to bed, dear?"

And if I replied, "In a minute, love," she would sigh and sit down on the stairs to wait for the expiration of that minute. Consequently it was always rather a short minute.

But this night she had been tired. She had bought a new hat, and had gone up to do her hair nine different ways in order to see which particular pad was necessary. I had been called up nine times to deliver judgment. I rather disappointed her, I fear, for I had gone into nine ecstasies, which pleased but naturally confused her. And then I had taken up my book and forgotten all about her. You see, the honeymoon was about over.

I looked at her asleep. She had been reading, and her bare white arm still held the novel open at the place where the chauffeur first met the Montenegrin princess. I gently took the book from her hand, without awakening her, slipped downstairs and brought up my own book, crept with it into bed and cautiously began to read.

"Oh," said Babette, sleepily and peevishly, "you're not going to read at this time of night, surely?"

That had been my intention. "You turn over, dear and go to sleep again."

Babette gave me a slow reproachful look; and when that happens a husband knows he has no chance. I shut my book, rolled out of bed and turned out the gas.

She wriggled across the little ridge of mountain that had already begun to be formed by the mattress, and, like a nice octopus, enveloped me in sleepy warmth.

"Ah," she luxuriously sighed, composing herself to sleep.

"Babette!" I said sharply, "I've been thinking."

She merely cuddled the closer—so close that when I patted her knee to attract her attention I found that I was patting my own knee. This was remarkable, for no woman's knee could possibly be mistaken for a man's. A woman's knee has no bones in it. In fact, it isn't a knee at all; it is a mere continuation of a rounded thigh into a rounded calf. It is a mere indispensable, sinewless bend. At least, Babette's is.

"Babette," I said, "have I ever suggested our sleeping in separate beds?"

She straightened, disentangled herself, and opened her eyes.

"Separate beds? Whatever for?"

"Oh," I said weakly. "It's more comfortable, for one thing."

"More comfy than cuddling up?" she asked, with frank incredulity.

"It's all right for a woman—she's built that way; but with a man it's different. He wants a bed to himself."

"Well?" Babette asked frigidly.

Babette was thinking. Whenever a woman troubles herself to think you know that she is merely trying to discover a way to put you in the wrong. At all costs I had to stop her clever little brain working.

"Then it's more healthy," I quickly said. "The doctors tell you that. More air. It's a mathematical fact that two persons sleeping in the same room produce twice as much carbonic acid gas as one does."

"Aren't our windows always both open?" she

retorted. "Isn't there enough fresh air for both of us? My lungs are smaller than yours, anyway."

"I'm not accusing you of deliberately producing carbonic acid gas. I'm merely stating the general medical opinion."

"You've just read that somewhere in some dull scientific book," she said, with a woman's immense contempt for anything but romantic fiction.

"Dearest," I said, "I'm merely raising the question. I wouldn't do anything that you object to. I thought we might just discuss it rationally and impersonally."

"You mean," she sharply cried, "that you're tired of me?"

"Nonsense! You know very well that——"

"You must be tired of me even to mention the subject, even to think of such an awful thing. I knew you couldn't love me as much as I love you." Her voice broke; and her voice is the one beautiful thing in the world that is more beautiful when it breaks. "All right," she said pitifully, "if you hate my bed, if you hate me, you can go and sleep by yourself. It is a wife's duty to obey, even when her husband is a brute. I'm sure I don't want to interfere with your selfish comfort. I'd rather sleep by myself, anyhow."

"Babette!"

She had turned her back. Her back had won. After half an hour's pleading she did not shrink at my touch, and five minutes later she sank contentedly asleep on my arm. It had gone to sleep, too.

Nothing was said about separate beds for a week; then one night the torrent burst.

"I told mother what you had suggested," she began. "That you wanted to sleep by yourself in a separate bed—in this cold weather, too. She was shocked. She said that she and father had slept together for forty years—all her married life she had gone to sleep on his shoulder

—and neither ever thought of doing anything else. And she admitted that it was a sign of what she had always suspected—that you didn't love me as much as I loved you. She said most men were like that."

I protested that Babette had altogether misunderstood me, and that, anyway, I had quite given up the idea.

"And I told Marion and Grace," she triumphantly concluded.

Marion is her greatest girl friend, and though she does not seem the type likely to get married, she appears, from Babette's account of their conversation, remarkably interested in the petty details of married life. I sometimes feel, when I meet Marion, that she knows exactly how many suits of pyjamas I possess and the colour of their stripes. Grace is the useful young married woman who gave Babette certain astonishingly frank details on the management of a husband. She began imparting her special knowledge long before the engagement was announced.

"And they both said it was dreadful. Marion even thought it cowardly; but I stood up for you. Grace couldn't understand how you could get tired of me so soon after our honeymoon. She said a separate bed was a taxi to the divorce court. And Marion said she would never, never marry now. Not that she's ever likely to, with that flat back," Babette added, with a scrupulous fairness. "And only to-day Mrs. Bleak asked me in the tram if it was true that you locked the door to your bedroom every night? And she will speak so loud in a tram. I had to say that it was absolutely untrue; but she's gone away to spread the rumour, and everybody will know by to-night that our marriage is a failure. Mother is coming down to-morrow."

"You surely have more sense than to pay attention to woman's gossip. You're a woman yourself, aren't

you? You know well enough that I'm in love with you, and will always be in love with you."

"And yet you hate to sleep in the same bed with me," she replied. "I'm sure I'm clean enough and nice enough to sleep with; and what is the use of all my pretty nighties if there is nobody to see me in them? The next thing will be that I'll get ill, and have to get the doctor down. He's never seen me in a nightie yet."

The doctor is young and unmarried—a thing no doctor should ever be.

But I would not give in. "But don't you see, Babette dear, there's more involved than appears. It's for our own happiness. Separate beds are the only way for us to preserve our married happiness. It's this married promiscuity, so to speak, that is the ruin of so many happy marriages. We should make it a rule not to see too much of each other—before it is too late. Why, I've never seen you undress yourself yet, Babette!"

"I should think not," she said, indignantly flushing. "But I've often wondered why you never wanted to."

"Want to! Do you think I don't want to?"

"Well?" she quickly smiled, then covered up the smile with the hasty remark, "I'd die of shame. Anyway, I wouldn't let you."

"The defect in marriage," I said earnestly, "is that the honeymoon comes to an end."

"You mean to say our honeymoon's over already?" Babette wailed.

"Well, in spots. But it's just because that it isn't over that I want to preserve the honeymoon feeling. And the only way to do that is to take great care of our honeymoon. The happiest marriage I ever read about was one in which the husband lived in the northern hemisphere and the wife in the southern hemisphere, and once every year the husband crossed the equator and even then he had to climb up a rope-ladder to his

wife's bedroom in the moonlight. It gave a kind of romance to what after a few years becomes only a kind of pleasant dulness."

Babette almost wept. "And you only want to see me once per annum! Though I think I would rather like the rope-ladder idea." And after a silence she grew quite delighted with the romance of it. "You know," she said, "we could easily fix up a sort of rope-ladder from your dressing-room."

I gave up. No woman has yet been created who can discuss general principles.

But the affair was not ended. Next day I was asked by a friend, whose wife is a friend of my wife's, why I had separated from Babette, and when she was going to bring her case in the courts, and whether the woman was that neat little typist in my office with the very short skirt. And that night, just as I was putting on my pyjamas, I heard an ominous sound—the key turning squeakily in my wife's bedroom door.

I knocked. The only answer was Babette's best snore.

"Babette!" I called, hoping that the maid would not hear. "You're not asleep."

"I am asleep," Babette indignantly replied. "At least I was, till you rudely woke me up. Is it morning yet?"

"Your door's locked."

"Of course, it's locked. Good-night, darling. I hope you sleep well."

"I shan't sleep at all."

"Why, Henry, isn't your bed warm enough? I put an extra blanket on it to-day."

"But I'm not sleeping in my bed."

"Where are you going to sleep then?" Babette permitted herself an undignified curiosity.

"On your doorstep."

"How romantic! Fancy my Henry thinking of such a nice thing as that!"

There was nothing further to be said. I miserably waited.

At last I heard her slip from the bed-clothes and try to steal to the door to find out if I was really still there. But of course Babette couldn't steal. She tramped. A woman is so accustomed to high heels that when she is without them she just thumps along. She waited at the door, then, evidently satisfied that I had gone back to my dressing-room, she quickly unlocked the door.

Quick as I was, when I entered her room she was in bed, with her dear eyes obstinately closed.

I slunk into the double bed. Babette shrank from my touch. I kissed her. She triumphantly smiled.

"Was its doorstep awful cold?" she purred.

"Cold and hard—like my wife."

"Ah!" Babette edged nearer.

The gas was still on. I noticed that Babette was wearing her wedding night-dress. I hadn't seen it again since our marriage. Once when I had asked about it, Babette had blushing said that she had put it away in lavender and mothball. To Babette's soul, I judged, there was something sacred in a wedding night-dress. There was a good deal of moth-ball about it still.

But I didn't mind.

"Oh," Babette cried, "I knew you loved me. I knew that Mother and Marion and Grace were all wrong. The horrible things they said about you. I shall never forgive Mother."

"I'm delighted to hear that," I said. "But, you know, this—this incident hasn't settled the question of single beds."

"Doesn't this settle it?" she radiantly smiled.

"I admit it's a compromise," I said, kissing her at low tide on the right shoulder; "but it hasn't been settled by logic."

"Oh, logic!" she happily sneered.

I recognised then that the only logic a woman knows is the logic of herself. Babette was the logic. She and her marriage night-dress were the two indisputable premises from which I could draw only one conclusion. An irrefutable logic.

I told her so; then I remembered my principles. "Well," I said, after I had sufficiently kissed her, "I've only come in just to kiss you good-night, Babette. I'm so glad you put that extra blanket on my little bed. It'll be cold after this nicely warmed bed."

She sat up, at the infinite peril of slipping clean out of her night-dress. Luckily, however, Babette is so built that provided the delicate lace holds, this could never happen.

"You actually mean to say that you're going to leave me, after all?" she gasped, happily unconscious how alluring she looked.

"Haven't we thrashed the whole thing out, Babette?" I sternly replied. "Haven't we both agreed that for hygienic reasons and for the preservation of our love for each other, we must sleep apart?"

She considered a moment before answering. "Yes, I see," she seriously said. "Logically, you're right, Henry. Well, good-night."

Babette leant over me—and when Babette leans over you there seems a lot of her—and kissed me good-night. At least, her kiss began as a good-night kiss, and then changed into a kiss of the honeymoon species. I cannot describe exactly the difference, but any married man will tell you.

I submitted to the first portion of Babette's kiss; but the concluding end, or termination, needed some

response. Babette got it. And just then I did not feel quite so logically sure that separate beds were hygienic, after all.

Next morning I looked at my virgin single bed. Babette had not even taken the trouble to put sheets in it. Woman has a logic of her own before which Euclid is an imbecile. Still, I think I can say that not all women are so delightfully logical as Babette.

Those sheets are not in my single bed yet. In fact, since Babette's mother hopes soon to be coming to stay with us, I intend sending the bed unostentatiously to a public auction-room.

DIALOGUE SIX

THE FIRST JEALOUSY

" If Woman ever Wondered About Herself, wouldn't she be Amazed—or Amused ? "—*The Babette Birthday Book.*

It was in the first few months of my marriage with Babette the beauteous. Naturally I was proud of Babette, though in those days perhaps I considered her merely as a piece of perfect statuary of which, by incredible good luck, I had acquired possession. My marriage with her had been like walking into an auction sale and picking up for a trifle a genuine Manet. I liked taking her out ; I liked her to dress smartly ; I hated her in the neutral colours that she so instinctively knew were the finest frame for her brilliant beauty. For myself, I would have clothed her in a rainbow.

I liked seeing other women shoot at her that professional all-comprehending glance that absorbs in one instant every feature and every curve, every tone and every detail of a beautiful woman and her attire. I had seen Babette use that professional glance at other women. One passing look at a woman seen on the street, and Babette knew whether that woman used lip-salve, whether she pencilled her eyebrows, whether she padded, or by what make of corset she contrived to stow away, and where she contrived to stow away, the excess of her superabundant figure, how much she paid for that corset, at what shop she got it, and at which particular sale, whether her lace was hand-made or

imitation, whether her stockings were all silk or had lisle feet and lisle tops, whether she possessed six pairs of shoes or only two, whether she was married, and if so what income her husband possessed, and, particularly, whether under any conceivable circumstances she might become dangerous. The sole danger she feared, except, of course, the horror every woman has that she might some day look her age, was that Some Other Woman might capture me from her. And in Babette's honeymoon every attractive woman was that contingent Some Other Cat. Babette had had considerable experience of her sex.

But not only was I proud if women scrutinised my wife, but I really liked men to admire her. Their admiration was not needed to convince me that I had acquired something really valuable, but it served to remind me. It was comforting to find that my own opinion was so universally confirmed. I might have become jealous if Babette had not always returned their predatory gaze with one that went clean through them, serenely unconscious of their existence. That was before the night at the theatre.

We had gone on an impulse, for I had already found that Babette adored impulses. When I booked seats days ahead Babette was pleased; but when at dinner I remarked, "Suppose we go and see this new show at the Criterion?" she was delighted. On this night, however, we were unable to get seats in the stalls, and had to content ourselves with a place at the corner of the dress circle, a front seat, with the seats raised in tiers behind us.

About the middle of the first act I became conscious that there were two men just behind us—they had come in after the curtain was up—and that their attention was not wholly occupied by the stage. In fact, most of it was concentrated on Babette's back.

Have I mentioned that Babette has a beautiful back? During my engagement I had guessed that it was charming, but during the honeymoon I learnt that my guess had been far short of the reality. Babette somehow knew it, too, though I doubt if any man in the world has ever examined his own back in a mirror. And when she committed the gross sacrilege of covering her back with clothes, mercifully she spared as much of it as possible. And it was really miraculous how much of it was possible. Owing to the providential formation of a woman's figure, while there is a fixed point of low-water mark in front—though Babette had long ago discovered that this really depends on the make-up of your corset and the shape of your dress (she varied between the deceptive square and the daring "V")—on a woman's back there is practically no limit, legal or practical, as to the distance the tide may fall.

So that this evening there was A Good Deal of Babette to be seen from behind. Of course, as soon as we took our seats, though it was a winter night, Babette instantly discovered that it was too hot inside the theatre for her to keep on her cloak. And when Babette sat back, though her chair obscured most of her back, still, seen over her bare shoulders and from above—the seating arrangements seemed specially designed by the architect for this scenic effect—there was really Rather More of Babette than presumably even Babette cared to show. (She had a bit of lace there, but it was very open-work lace—rather like a piece of wire-netting.)

In the first interval Babette sat back, and the two men leaned forward. Luckily my wife was serenely unconscious of their interest, and soon afterwards the two men went out for a drink. I did not care to mention so delicate a matter, since Babette, like all her sex, is a prude. A woman will deliberately disclose as much of her figure as the by-laws allow—and some of the by-

laws are dreadfully out of date. She will dispense with that article of attire which her sex began to wear only two centuries ago, but which the modern tight skirt renders, in her opinion, superfluous; but if she knew that when she stands between the sunlight and the average unmarried man, for all the value her skirt is she might as well be in a bathing costume, she would be painfully shocked. So she will deliberately attract the roving eye of the strange male by cunningly disposed bébé-ribbons that beckon beneath an open-work blouse; yet if she finds on returning home that a corset string has escaped a placquet hole she weeps. The principle a woman has formulated for herself in these matters is that any male may see any part of her, or of her attire, that she means him to see, but if he sees even the most innocent portion of her dress that is not meant to be seen, he is a Horrible Brute. Thus if the adorable Babette learnt that strange men could see more of her than the absurdly liberal allowance she, out of the fullness of her heart, gave them, she would feel dreadfully immodest. And, curiously enough, she would hate me for being the innocent instrument for enlightening her.

Since our marriage Babette had told me of the Awful Catastrophe that had happened to her in the middle of a crowded street when an indispensable tape had broken, and a strange woman had helped her to the shelter of the nearest draper's shop. Babette had felt no gratitude to this unknown Samaritan, who had prevented Babette from literally falling by the wayside. On the contrary she confessed quite naturally that she hated that woman, and would always hate her.

A strange man can accost any man and inform him that he has a piece of fluff on his shoulder, and quietly remove it for him; and the fluffy man will be quite grateful. But if one strange woman calls the attention of another woman to the apparent fact that she has

forgotten, in the hurry of running for the train, to button up the back of her blouse, those women part enemies for life. Whereas if a blundering man dared even to mention the gaping fact he would be frozen with a stare.

As the two men made their way noisily to their seats behind us, after having evidently had more than one drink, Babette gave them a fleeting glance, and quickly dropped her eyes to her programme. Something had apparently disturbed her. The orchestra was noisily busy, and around us was the sustained hum of conversational chatter, but through it all I heard the young man behind who had the clearest view over Babette's shoulder, remark :

" Bit of all right, eh ? "

The other man cautiously laughed.

Luckily Babette had not heard, but shortly afterwards she casually turned round in her seat and glanced over the rows of seats that towered behind us. There was nothing in her action that could fix on her any blame, even to my jealous mind. I was sure that she hadn't heard—yet what man can tell whether women do not possess an extra sense, by means of which even the unspoken and the unapparent admiration of any man is subtly conveyed to them? Still, a wife should not have turned round and stared in that way.

I had hurriedly to make conversation with Babette to cover up any further remarks made by those men behind. But my precautions were vain.

As the curtain ascended, I distinctly heard the young man say to the other, " Bet you I'll make her turn round again ! "

I saw red. Quickly I swung round in my seat, but in the darkness saw only two blurs of white where faces should have been. What could I do? The man had evidently had the one glass too many, and any protest

of mine would only lead to a scene. And Babette would be the centre of that scene. Miserably and impotently I turned again to the stage.

A quick glance showed me that Babette had not heard. Yet she was curiously restless. In the semi-darkness I noticed her fiddling with the little bit of indispensable lace that had got stranded in the "V." Still, a woman's principal occupation is to fiddle with her attire, to pat her hair, or send exploring fingers on voyages of discovery up and down her back.

"Babette," I whispered, "I want you to do something for me, something important."

"Important?" she said in surprise. "What is it?"

"Don't look round again at those men behind you."

Babette never moved. She had become a piece of beautiful statuary. "What on earth for?" she asked at last.

"Because I ask you," I said sternly.

"But," she began, "I . . . I . . . Why should I want to look round at those men? And how do I know there are any men there? And why shouldn't I, if I like?"

"Simply because your husband asks you, Babette."

"But this is extraordinary," she breathlessly began. "I don't know those men—if there are men behind me. . . . Henry, you must tell me why you don't want me to do such an ordinary thing."

Whenever Babette calls me Henry I know she is in earnest. She doesn't often call me Henry. She has her own name for me, but that name will never appear in print. A man has some dignity to keep up—even a married man.

"I can't possibly tell you now," I whispered back.

"Surely!" Babette spoke hotly. "You make a perfectly ridiculous request, without the vestige of a reason. And you've simply made me curious. I hadn't

the least desire to turn round before you spoke, but now I simply must."

"Listen to me," I sternly said. "I can't give you my reason here, but there is a good reason. And if you don't do as I tell you, if you make the least attempt to turn round, I'll take you straight home. You must trust me, Babette dear. I'm your husband, and it is for your own sake that I am speaking. And I mean it."

It was the first time that Babette had seen her husband in me. So far she had considered me as a rather delightful child, to be cajoled and humoured. It took her some minutes to absorb the shock. When she spoke, it was in a sobered mood. "Very well, husband," she said. "Of course I know the whole thing is absurd on your part, but I'll be a good little girl since you tell me to so sternly."

And her hand stole into mine and gave it a delightful squeeze.

"Thanks," I said.

But as I bent to her I looked down the white slope of her bosom and noticed that the rag of lace had disappeared. Since I had assisted her in fixing her corset that evening, I knew that the lace, whose function was to disguise—or was it to emphasise?—the "V," could not have slipped down. There was nowhere for it to slip to, since all below the "V" was Babette, corset and bosom.

"Why, Babette," I whispered, "what's become of that bit of lace?"

"Oh," she airily answered, "I took it out. I felt so hot. Wouldn't you think that on a night like this the theatre would be better ventilated?"

What could I say? What was there to be said? But all the rest of that evening I was miserably wondering who it was that I had married. Only the next day did I discover that I had married—a woman.

As soon as the curtain fell, I hurried the bareness of Babette into her cloak, and rushed her out. She made not the slightest attempt to look round. She kept her eyes down. On the street she looked up to me for my explanation, but I shook my head. The explanation could not come then and there. And when we got home Babette deliberately sulked. She sulks adorably. I had to remind myself that I was angry with her, else I couldn't have refrained from kissing her. And I had the feeling that to kiss her then would be about as much use as Moses striking the wrong rock.

In silence I untied and unpinned her and in silence I sucked my pricked finger. But when we got to bed I told her what that man had said.

"No!" she hotly protested. "That man couldn't have said a thing like that."

"But I distinctly heard him. So did his friend."

Babette considered. "And he looked such a nice man, too. So clean-looking, and with such interesting eyes. And now all the romance has gone out of it. I liked him. I liked him to look at me . . . but to make a vulgar bet about me! It makes me feel so—so cheap!"

"Exactly," I sternly said.

"Still," she went on more cheerfully, "though he was so common, he did admire me. And I liked that. I could feel his admiration all the time through my shoulders."

"There wasn't much on them to prevent it," I said.

"But surely," she asked open-eyed, "you like me to look smart?"

I was beginning to wonder whether I did like it.

"Not for the amusement of bounders," I replied.

"But how can I help people, even bounders, admiring me, if I look pretty?" Babette said with pathos.

"By not letting them see that you like it. By not

encouraging them, and by keeping that piece of lace in the place where it belonged."

"Oh!" Babette was hurt. "You really think that I could be so—so animal—as to take that piece of lace out for—for that man?"

"Well, whom did you take it out for?"

"It was just a stupid impulse, Henry. I felt so hot, and that theatre really should be better ventilated, shouldn't it?"

With this, Babette turned on me the back that had caused all the trouble. And I felt furiously jealous of every created male. That beautiful back was my private property, and Babette was calmly allowing perfect strangers to inspect the premises.

"But, Babette," I cried, "don't you know I love you? I know you didn't deliberately encourage that man; but I suppose you can't help encouraging any man. But that bit of lace that went missing! That was deliberate. And though I love you—oh, more than ever—how can I ever again respect you?"

"Henry!" she almost sobbed, "if you can say such things, if you can think that of me, I . . . I shall tell mother!"

She hunched herself, patted the pillow, pulled up the bed-clothes so that a thick ridge of wool intervened between the nearest adjacent portions of Babette and me, and snuggled down, like a curled kitten, to sleep.

But she did not sleep—for hours. So we lay there, with the unnecessary blanket between us, silent, pretending to breathe regularly, in the darkness that had so heavily descended upon our happiness.

When I woke in the morning, I sleepily turned to wake Babette with the "Good-morning" kiss. But she was not in bed. Then I remembered. I saw her figure bending over her dressing-table. Some instinct

prompted me not to stir. I felt intensely curious to know what she was doing at her dressing-table.

In my effort to see I must have made a noise, for she swiftly turned and saw me. She started. In her hand I distinctly saw a piece of letter paper. The next moment she had turned her back to me; and though there is considerable width in Babette's back I knew that she was making a quick attempt to conceal something. I sprang from the bed, but before I reached her she had shut the top drawer of her dressing table and defiantly faced me. -

"What are you doing here?" I cried.

"Just looking at my nose," she replied. "Don't you think it's the teeniest bit red?"

The horrible suspicion that had seized me turned to an equally horrible certainty.

"What was it you shut in that drawer? You're hiding a letter!"

"Oh, you saw, did you?" she quietly said, one hand holding the drawer shut.

"Whose letter?" I hotly demanded. All the foolishness of last night was nothing to this dreadful proof of her guilt. That my wife, that Babette, could have a letter that she did not want me to see!

"Mine, you stupid."

"Who sent it?"

"It hasn't been sent."

"You mean that it didn't come through the post?"

"No," she actually laughed. It seemed to me that she was almost enjoying herself.

"Who gave it to you?"

All Babette gave me was a look of raillery and a happy "Ah!"

"That man last night!" I exploded. "I might have guessed. He slipped a note into your hand!"

Babette brazenly laughed outright "No, dear."

she chuckled, "not into my hand. How could he, sitting behind me like that? But . . . there was all my back."

I shivered. "You mean to say that he slipped it down your back?"

"Well, wouldn't it be the most convenient post-office?"

I was maddened. "Babette," I stormed, "give me that letter this instant."

"Oh, no, I really couldn't. Didn't I tell you that it was mine?"

"Then I'll take it."

Babette faced me—a new, utterly incomprehensible Babette. I paused stupidly to think that this new being was the wife I had married. And I was smitten with a sudden fear—not fear for myself, but for my marriage. If I took that letter by main force from the drawer, then I certainly knew something that held us together would break. It might be but a minor strand of the cord that held us, but the weakness would always be there. I didn't dare.

"You shan't!" she defied me; she, so rounded, so small, so childish, so weak, yet so strong.

"No," I said when that moment of fierce tension was over, "you will show it to me yourself."

To my confusion she replied, "Yes, of course, but, please, not now."

"Babette," I said at length, "I trust you. My dear Babette, I must trust you—else what would there be left of our marriage? If you've done wrong, I can forgive you. I must forgive you! But I trust you. I shan't look in that drawer; you can leave it open; but I know that you will show me that letter."

"Haven't I said so?" she smiled. "But not now. I must go to my bath." She left the dressing-table to

don her bath-robe. "By the way, dear, the drawer is not locked. But I know you will not open it."

If Babette could do a foolish thing, she could also do a splendid one. She could leave a jealous husband alone in a room with the proofs of her infidelity—oh, only of thought!—under his hand, and yet she knew that she could depend on his word not to look at them.

"Babette," I said, as she paused at the door, "whatever you have done is wiped out by the great trust you have in me. You can leave that drawer unlocked."

"Why shouldn't I?" she strangely smiled. "Because the letter isn't there!"

She disappeared. I heard the key of the bathroom door turned. This had never happened before. I have a mental vision of pink Babette in her white bath—but it has remained merely a rosy mental vision. This, to honeymoon husbands, will sound incredible. I learnt, long afterwards, that it had also seemed incredible to Babette.

I waited, miserable, for Babette's return. Her magnificence had dwindled until now I saw her a carelessly impenitent sinner. This adorable wife of mine was also adorable to other men. Yet, her transgression could surely have been only a tiny one; and I felt, in that melting mood that comes after every quarrel, that she had only to make her pitiable confession and I would forgive her. Honeymoon husbands are like that. That is why so many marriages survive the honeymoon.

Babette came running back, glowing in her bath-robe. "O-oh!" she shivered, "the shower was cold! Hadn't you better hurry? We'll be late for breakfast."

I went to the bathroom and stepped under the shower. As I put my hand up to turn on the water I saw tied to the tap with a piece of tape a folded

note. On it was hurriedly pencilled, "The Fatal Letter!"

In the bath I read it.

There are no reticences in married life, but there are reticences about married life. So the reader will pardon the husband if he gives but the gist of Babette's married letter. To me she had a frankness of phrase that was nearly as naked as I then was.

She had been right when she claimed the letter as hers. For she had written it herself as soon as she woke that morning, and I had detected her as she had finished it. I had evidently prevented her concealing it in the drawer. All the time we had stood facing each other she had it and her pencil hidden in her hand—at which, of course, I had never thought of looking.

And her letter was a full confession. She admitted that she must have encouraged that man by her eyes. (And I admit that Babette's eyes are the sort that would encourage any man.) And she admitted having removed the lace, and not because of the lack of fresh air in the theatre. But when it came to explaining why, she honestly could not tell. It was an impulse, a piece of pure mischief . . . she didn't know how or why. And she had been sorry the moment after, and if I hadn't spoken to her about it, she would have shoved it back at once. But when I blamed her, she simply had to brazen it out. Because then she knew that I could be dreadfully jealous of her—and that was a thing that she had long worried herself over. For if I couldn't be jealous, then I couldn't really love her. And it was so delightful to feel that I was jealous that she simply had to keep it up. But all the way home she knew that she had been a silly naughty child, and if I had just given her a good slapping she would have been as good as gold. But when I had told her

of that beast's nasty bet, she felt so indignant with me—she had to be indignant with somebody, and I was the nearest person to vent it on—that she simply had to sulk. But oh, how she loved her big, stern, jealous husband! And if he had only kissed her good and hard that night she had been prepared to be so penitent and meek. And long before she had gone to sleep she had forgiven him. She couldn't have gone to sleep until she did.

And when he had caught her writing the letter—this was the postscript she had scribbled in the bathroom—she was so thrilled by my furious jealousy that she had to keep it up. Because it showed her that I madly loved her. No husband is a husband unless he is ready to be jealous at the slightest thing. And now she was waiting to be forgiven. She wouldn't begin to dress until she had been completely forgiven . . . and always after a cold shower she felt so warm and clean. . .

The letter ended: "Now, darling, turn on the cold shower—quick!"

DIALOGUE SEVEN

THE PERFUME OF GLADYS

"A Clever Woman can marry Any Man She Wants. Judging by results, either Women are Not Clever or they Don't Want Much."—*The Babette Birthday Book*.

If Gladys had not been addicted to the use of that scent our married happiness would have been irretrievably wrecked; in fact, it was Gladys and her scent that saved us from the divorce court—that railway station for which so many happy honeymooners unwittingly take their tickets. Gladys is not the name of my wife, it is the front name of a barmaid.

The thoughtless have perhaps wondered why so often in divorce cases a barmaid figures in the list. The fact is that in modern life if there weren't any barmaids there wouldn't be any co.; for married life shuts the door on the husband and leaves all the nice unmarried girls outside. All the nice girls he knew before he met his Babette drop out of the bridegroom's existence, with the noiseless suddenness of a descending lift, the day after the wedding. At the wedding he saw heaps of girls, and vaguely wondered why they were so eager to kiss him. They were really saying their last farewells.

This was disconcerting, for he had got accustomed to meeting nice girls at dances and "evenings." A bachelor has no possible chance of avoiding the nice girls with which kindly Providence, like a genial chaperon, has comfortably filled his world. He gets to

know them quite well, to flirt with them in the nice, non-committal way which nice girls so thoroughly understand, and to kiss them in a brotherly fashion on their sisterly lips. And surrounded by this crowd of nice accessible girls the bachelor has neither time nor inclination to philander with the barmaid. Three kisses and one hug per evening are enough for any serious^x and God-fearing young man who has his way to make in the world. And he hasn't to pay for them, except in kind. But with barmaids it is more difficult. You've got to drink, often more than you care for, and there are cases when it is necessary to provide jewellery or even order an expensive supper. But the reputation of any nice girl would be ruined if you presented her with a diamond bracelet or took her to supper in a private room. And the nice girl knows that. The pleasing custom is for her to provide the supper; all the man has to do is to eat it and sit out one dance with her.

But when he marries his Babette he has not only to provide her supper, but her breakfast, lunch and dinner. And though he is allowed by the law to give her more than three kisses a day and one hug, he has to pay for them by pearls. And the nice, non-committal girls decide that their kisses would be wasted on a married man—and, really, those non-committal kisses are wasted on him. And when he meets them on the street he does not take them into afternoon tea; for he learns disquieting things about them all. That is what his wife is for.

I knew five nice non-committal girls, with the total allowance of fifteen kisses and five hugs per diem, whose characters have deteriorated in the most shocking way since I married Babette. Before marriage I, in my innocence, regarded them as quite nice girls. But from what Babette told me unwillingly in confidence—I had

to drag the facts out of her—they were really harpies in disguise. Every one of them had the most horrible designs on me. Their generous allowance of non-committal kisses, to say nothing of their unbunnylike hugs, were dangerous snares. They were after me all the time. Babette knew her sex. Those five girls had behaved in a way that from their non-committal kisses I should not have thought possible. For instance, that evening when I called, in answer to a telephone ring, to spend the evening with Violet and her sisters, and found her in an alluring state of tearful dismay because her parents and her two sisters had all gone out, leaving her lonely in the drawing-room—that was nothing but a plot. Violet had packed her parents and her sisters off, just to get me alone. She got me alone, for though she told me timidly to go away and leave her in the deserted drawing-room—though she was horribly afraid of burglars—I insisted on staying; in fact, she agreed with me to regard the situation as a great adventure. But I felt that under the circumstances a man's honour precluded his exceeding the limit of three kisses and one hug; but, probably through sheer nervousness, Violet seemed to lose count of her non-committal kisses, and the one hug lasted so long that my left leg, on which she was sitting, went to sleep. And when, to my relief, a weight was lifted from my heart, and my left leg, by the return of the family for supper, Violet's mother called Violet away to see about the coffee. And when her mother returned she was almost snappy to me and quite cattish to innocent Violet.

"Don't you see, you stupid old dear," Babette exclaimed, "that was all a put-up job between Violet and her mother to get you to propose?"

"But, Violet!" I protested. "She has such trustful eyes."

" I know her mother."

" Then," I said, remembering, " that night you asked me to come up to your place to spend the evening with a few musical friends, and you explained that all those you had specially asked had been unable to turn up, and you would have to entertain me by yourself? "

" I explained that," said Babette hastily. " Besides, you did propose."

" Not that evening."

" No; I've often wondered why you didn't. But, don't you see, you were in love with me, and you weren't with Violet. That makes all the difference."

" I see," I said. " I don't see, now that I know the depths of deception that lay behind her trustful eyes, that I can really ever be friends with Violet again."

" Oh, no," Babette generously cried. " You mustn't cut her in the street—at least, not at first. Just let her see that you have found her out, and gradually you will find that she will see she is not wanted."

That is exactly what happened to my friendship with Violet, and with the four other nice, non-committal girls. But I confess that after the first few months of tumultuous married happiness I began to miss, not exactly the five nice girls, but the whole tribe of available girls. They had been wiped out. And there was no one to take their place. After marriage a man has no opportunity to make the acquaintance of nice, non-committal girl friends. Your wife sees to that. She has, it is true, her own girl friends; but even when they are nice you think too highly of your wife even to pretend to flirt with them. And her friends think too highly of your wife to permit you. Every time I tried the invariable answer was :

" But think of Babette—think of your wife ! "

And one actually told Babette. Of course, Babette refused to believe her. It was only two months after

the honeymoon, and there is nothing so sacred as a young wife's trust in her husband. Naturally she could not conceive it possible that I should seek feminine distractions outside our home. Babette provided those herself. The only result of that girl's treachery, or loyalty—it depends on the way you look at it—was that Babette discovered that she didn't like that girl—had never really liked her—and wouldn't ask her to the house again.

"Where there's smoke there's fire," she sagely remarked. "The mere fact that she accused you of trying to flirt with her shows me that she wanted you to; and because you didn't she said you did."

There is nothing so convincing as a woman's logic; at least, it convinced me.

But after six months of married bliss I found myself automatically cut off from all possible non-committal flirtations; and I had rather got into the habit of flirtation. I rather missed my daily allowance of kisses, even though Babette exceeded it. Habits are terrible things; even marriage doesn't change them. There ought to be something about habits—even harmless habits like mine—in the marriage service. Both bride and bridegroom should be compelled solemnly to renounce all bachelor and maiden habits, and immediately to acquire matrimonial ones.

The nice girls being thus automatically counted out, all that is left is the barmaid. A married man can't strike up an acquaintance with a single girl without attracting remark, and he doesn't get the chance to know a girl whom his wife doesn't know where there is no chance of attracting remark; except, of course, if he is in business and has a feminine typist. I hadn't one—then. And, naturally, a man's wife—at least before he trains her—always knows where he goes when he leaves his home. Even the remark that you

have to go back to the office in the evening isn't much good. For no really nice girl would take the risk of going to a man's private office at night; and when I'm working late at my office Babette rings up every fifteen minutes. And you can't get the full enjoyment out of a flirtation in your office when you're interrupted every quarter of an hour; you seem to be waiting for the telephone bell between every kiss.

So there is left only the barmaid. And you can see a barmaid at any time during office hours. She's there—rather like a wife, always at home, always ready to see you, always with a welcome. And there is no chance of meeting any other nice girl—who might possibly be a friend of your wife's—in the bar. And, even if you're seen entering a bar, you've always got a good excuse.

Thus the happily married man, with a flirtatious tendency, is practically thrown into the arms of the barmaid. That's what she is there for.

Gladys, you will understand, was not an ordinary barmaid. No barmaid ever really is. And from what my friends have told me about barmaids I have come to the conclusion that they are an extraordinary race. There was something about Gladys that differentiated her from every other barmaid of my acquaintance. And she rather reminded me of Babette. I can't exactly say how, but there must have been something, else why should I have been attracted to her? But when I got to know Gladys better—and it is amazing how soon you get to know even an extraordinary barmaid like Gladys better—I found that in other ways she was not in the least like Babette. That encouraged me to learn to know her still better. Now, I love my wife; I think her the best wife in the world. But then, she's a wife. So you see, Gladys, who isn't a wife—at least not my wife—cannot really be compared with

Babette. And, anyhow, I think too highly of my wife to compare her even with Gladys.

One evening I kissed Gladys across the bar. It is an awkward way to kiss anyone; though Gladys helped me all she could. And I fancy that in the stress of the moment I murmured something about seeing her on her next evening out; but I'm not sure. When you're kissing a girl you never are sure. That's why there are so many marriages.

It was late when I got home. Babette was in bed, sound asleep. She had flung her pigtail from beneath her neck on to the pillow. It lay there looking like a thick, a burn interrogation mark. I have often wondered what that nightly question means. I wondered as I slipped into bed and cuddled up to Babette.

I don't know if it is the same with other women—my experience has been too limited—but when Babette is asleep she seems to emanate a drowsy warmth that is far above fever temperature, Fahrenheit. On this cold night it was very pleasant. Babette stirred, put her lips sleepily up to be kissed, asked me drowsily whether I had locked the front door, and seen that all the windows were closed, and wiped my feet, and wound the clock, and put out the light on the landing, and turned out the bedroom gas?

I murmured "Yes," and kissed her.

Instantly she was wide awake. "Henry," she exclaimed, "you've been kissing another woman!"

I gasped. It was the first time I had been struck by the intuition of woman. It struck me like a brick.

"A horrid woman," she added, with intense conviction.

"Nonsense!" I feebly said.

"Henry!" When Babette calls me Henry the referee starts his count.

"You've been kissing some horrid woman to-night,

Henry. It's no use your denying it. And—" she sniffed, " a barmaid ! "

More intuition.

" Well," I said, desperately, " what if I have ? "

Babette straightened herself. " I can't believe it of you," she cried. " My Henry, to kiss another woman."

" I couldn't help it," I said. " I was having a drink on my way home and—and it just happened—I didn't mean it. I was just leaning over to her, talking to her, and somehow our lips touched ; that's all. Nothing to make a fuss about, is it ? You see, it might have been our elbows that happened to touch, and nobody would object if it was elbows, would they ? Well, as it happened, it was our lips."

" You don't kiss with your elbows," Babette snorted.

" It was a pure accident," I explained. " And I swear to you, Babette, that it will never happen again."

" Then it did happen ? " Babette moaned. " Even though I knew you had kissed her, I refused to believe it. Oh, and I thought you were—safe. That a husband of mine"—she spoke as if she had thirty-eight—" that a husband of mine should even want to kiss another woman ! And a barmaid ! Henry, you have broken my heart ! "

She relapsed into sobs.

I got out of bed, groped in the darkness for the chest of drawers, and came back to bed with two of my largest handkerchiefs. I knew we were in for a wet evening.

Between two sobs Babette snatched the handkerchiefs and applied them to her nose. Then she went on crying, with, it seemed to me, new vigour.

I felt an unutterable cad. The thought of that bar-maidenly kiss was a thought of loathing. How could I have forgotten Babette for even the moment when our lips had met across the bar ? And I had degraded

my love for Babette by that out-of-bounds caress. It seemed incomprehensible to me how I could have wanted to kiss Gladys. Here, crying her dear eyes out, was the most alluring woman in the world, and I had gone from her arms to wallow in barmaidenly embraces. I stammered out something of this to Babette, but she was too busily occupied in blowing her adorable nose to catch all I said.

"All very well," she sobbed. "But I can never look on you with the same feeling again. You have broken my heart; you have ruined my life. I shall never see you again. I shall go home to mother."

She meant it. Babette was a woman, and all women are conventional. The only proper thing to do when you find your husband out is to go home to your mother.

"But, Babette," I cried, "I swear it will never happen again. Won't you forgive me? I'll never see that woman again. Oh, how can I show you how sorry I am?"

I felt that, lying there by Babette's side in the darkness, I was at a disadvantage. In the usual quarrel it is quite easy, when you're worked up to it, to be convincing and even dramatic. But a quarrel between a husband and a wife in bed, with the gas out, at 1.30 a.m., is not only undignified but a trifle absurd. How could I express my contrition when my head was on the pillow and I was speaking to an unseen head on the same pillow?

"It's all over," Babette moaned. "Leave me."

There was nothing else I could do. But I didn't go. For there was nowhere for me to sleep except in an armchair in the drawing-room. "Leave me!" sounds so final on the stage; but for a wife to ask her husband to get out of a warm bed and spend a sleepless night on a chair is carrying even the higher drama too far.

"Well?" Babette said, coldly.

"You know that if I have to leave the room I'll catch a cold," I mildly said.

"That's true," Babette moaned. "But that a husband of mine could think of his own selfish comfort when he has ruined my life!"

I got hurriedly out of bed, but as I fumbled for the catch of the door Babette called, "Don't be ridiculous, Henry. A false husband is bad enough, but a husband with a cold in his head would be simply horrid. Come back to bed at once."

I crept back, and recognised that my plight was little better; for, by all the rules of married life, I had to keep right on the extreme edge of the bed, and as there is a good deal of Babette, the mattress slopes down to her, and my side of the bed was rather like the roof of a house. And right at the other side, with a desert of linen between us, was the warm cuddlesomeness of Babette. How ever could I have wanted to kiss Gladys?

"Darling," I ventured, "I've done wrong; but this is a lesson. Can't you forgive me, ever?"

"Never! I can never trust you again. Another handkerchief, please."

I replenished her stock of handkerchiefs.

"It's no use you saying another word," she sobbed. "Nothing can ever make things the same again."

I saw that penitence would not do. I had an inspiration. "Babette," I said, sharply, though I hated myself, "unless you forgive me this minute, I swear I'll kiss that woman again."

She gasped. "You brute! Mother was right. Go to your barmaid!"

"I shall! I'll go to her the first thing to-morrow. I'd go to her now, only I don't know her address. I don't even know her second name."

"Oh," she wailed, "you prefer that creature to me?"

"No ; but you force me into her arms."

"You prefer her kisses to mine."

"No !"

"I'm sure," she murmured, "she can't kiss you as nicely as I do."

I enthusiastically agreed.

"But you don't know how nicely I *can* kiss," she went on. "You've known only my honeymoony kisses ; but I can do better than that. And now you'll never know."

"No," I said, coldly ; "but you're a little unfair to—to the barmaid. I've only kissed her once. Who knows, when we've had more experience, whether she won't improve in her kissing?"

Babette moaned. I could not stand it. "But I'm not going to experiment any more with barmaids," I said. "And as you won't believe I love you, I'm going to show you. You can scream, you can struggle, you can scratch, but I'm going to kiss you now."

"Oh !" she gasped, and lay quite still.

She did not scream, she did not struggle, she did not scratch.

"Darling," she said at last, "you never kissed that odious woman like that !"

"And I never intend to, as long as *you* can kiss like that."

"I'm so glad," she whispered, snuggling closer. "I forgive you, for I know that it's me you love, after all. And I'm glad you kissed that barmaid. It has put me on my mettle, and for every kiss you attempt to give her or any other woman again, I'll give you ten of mine. I've been satisfied and contented with the silly thought that I had you safe. It's made me lazy, hasn't it? But now that I know I've got to fight for you, you won't have any leisure to kiss anybody else."

So, happily we went to sleep, I with her pigtail in

my mouth and her arm ricking my neck, quite in the honeymoon way.

Our marriage had been saved from wreck. Babette had learnt the dangers that lie in wait for husbands. It is the unsuspecting wives who fail to bring their happiness safely past the shoals of marriage. On one of these hidden obstacles to matrimonial navigation Babette would assuredly have lost me; I would have come to grief on the Scylla of Gladys, or in the Charybdis of Flossie, if it hadn't so miraculously happened that the siren was addicted to scent.

DIALOGUE EIGHT

MARRIAGE IDEALS

"There are Many Ways of Being Dull. The pleasantest is to be Married."—*The Babette Birthday Book*.

IF it hadn't been for that dance, Babette and I might never have found out the real meaning of marriage; we might have gone blindly on in the belief that marriage was merely a kind of dwindling and shrinking honeymoon—instead of which, of course, it is an entirely different thing, as distinct and distant from the honeymoon as the honeymoon is from one's bachelorhood.

Babette and I had been looking forward to that dance. For at the same ball, in the same ballroom, with the same hostesses, two years before, I had for the first time met Babette. Curious! I was very nearly not going . . . and it was the merest chance that Babette was there. If her frock hadn't come home at the last minute . . . if I hadn't happened to remember the date . . . well, this history would never have been written, and I should not have discovered how different marriage is to one's ideals of it. That night I met Babette I had been full of ideals.

Since our marriage, Babette and I had declined all dances. My wife said frankly that she didn't see the necessity for losing hours of sleep jigging around a room when she could be at home with me. I agreed. Still, this dance was a different matter. Babette thought it was our duty to show ourselves.

"They want to exhibit us, that's all," she explained; "as an example of what might happen to other people who are careless enough to go to dances. . . . And it ought to be rather fun, oughtn't it, dear? Just to recall that wonderful first night when we met? I feel sure I'll enjoy it immensely."

Poor child! She did not guess, as she arrayed her beautiful self in the least possible amount of clothes sanctioned by chaperons, that she was dressing for a funeral. That night witnessed the decent interment of our marriage ideals.

Until I was engaged to Babette I had never thought much about marriage. I conceived it with as much distinctness as I conceived Heaven—a vague place, full of vague delights; but a strange land a long way off, about which there would be plenty of time to think when, if ever, I got there. But when Babette proposed to me—she did it, of course, very nicely and gently, so as not to make me feel uncomfortable—suddenly my nebulous visions of marriage took a definite and distinct shape. After Babette, with true womanly intuition and tact, had got me safely over the awkwardness of the proposal, she allowed me to dream of marriage. Indeed, she even encouraged me to dream. But this dream was not in the least like my earlier dreams. It had a focus. I felt that it was not a strange country I was so perilously voyaging to, but a land where I would find at least one familiar face. I was not merely going to get married—any fellow can do that if he can find a girl considerate enough to propose to him—but I was going to do something that nobody else in all the long centuries of history had ever succeeded in doing; I was going to marry Babette. I used to wonder how anybody else had ever had the pluck to marry, for there was only one Babette in the world. The only explanation I could find for those notices I saw every day in

the "Marriages" column of the paper was the conjecture that all women are Babettes. Which is absurd.

In my vision, then, I saw Babette my wife, the centre of my home. I had lived long in lodging-houses; and my dream of a home was a place as different from a lodging-house as Babette's nose was from all the other noses in Christendom. I would come home tired out with my work at the office—really, my work at the office wasn't in the least exhausting, but one likes one's wife to preserve, at least, one illusion about oneself; else, how could we husbands keep our wives' respect? I would come wearily home, with a quickening step as I saw Babette patiently waiting at the front gate. (As it happened, that phase lasted just five weeks) Or on a wet day she would run to the door as she recognised my ring. And, though with electric bells one ring is just like another, Babette's wifely intuition would recognise it, and run. (She ran to the door thirty-eight times; after that I had to use my latch-key—which, after all, is what a latch-key is for.)

And when I entered, my wife would smother me with kisses. (She smothered me for a fortnight, kissed me for nine more weeks, pecked me for the succeeding three and a half months; and after that I forgot to notice whether she pecked or not.) So I would go in; and she would seize my hat and coat and hang them up, giving each of them a little kiss, conveying to me in her flutter and her talk the soothing sensation that in some miraculous way she had rescued me from a bleak and dangerous world outside. She had got me home from the wild and wicked world of men. And before the fire I would find a comfortable easy chair—my chair, jealously reserved for me, never occupied by herself, unless I happened to be sitting in it myself; and, toasting in the warmth of the fire, my comfortable

home slippers would await my weary feet. I could visualise those slippers in detail; for they were the ones she embroidered for me in the first week of our engagement—embroidered with dear, fantastic, virginal, Babettish dreams. At least, she gave them to me in the first week of our engagement—for I found out accidentally that she had begun them two months before she met me. Women have an uncanny intuition sometimes.

(She seized my hat fourteen times, kissed it thirteen times, hung it up twelve times. The comfortable chair was ready and reserved for me for nearly three weeks; then it began to be occupied by Babette's sewing—no, not darning, sewing—then it began to be difficult to find, smothered beneath the white blizzard of Babette's sewing. The slippers toasted themselves for six weeks; then I had to fish them out of a corner, and I found a needle in the left one.)

But it was darning that I most looked forward to. It was true that, as a bachelor, I could usually prevail upon my motherly landlady, or some motherly spinster, surreptitiously to darn my socks for me. But I confess I looked forward with delight to the picture of my Babette daintily darning my socks in the evening while I smoked my pipe. That picture expressed my ideal of domesticity. (Babette darned my socks for five weeks and sewed on three buttons. After that she rather let things go. It was not that Babette wasn't fond of sewing; she revelled in sewing. But not darning. She never had time for darning; she was always busy over "hand-work" for herself. "Darning," she said, "was no white woman's work." She had a sewing machine, but she refused to use it when she was making those piles of white things she seemed to require and wear out so quickly. But I must admit that she did not altogether neglect my socks. About once a month I

would find every available sock put away neatly, and every one of them exquisitely darned. Then I knew that she must have invited her mother down to spend the afternoon.)

And to my wife I would tell all my business worries. I would pour them all out into Babette's sympathetic ear; and she would cheer me up and cuddle me and cuddle me, and with her soft hand smooth away all the wrinkles from my brow. (But I never got time to discourse on my worries—Babette was always so busy telling me hers. They were mostly servants.)

Well, it wasn't at all like my ideal . . . but there were compensations. You see, I had had the luck to marry Babette.

I hurried home the day of the dance, to find Babette two-thirds dressed. She triumphantly informed me that she had done her hair. It really looked like it.

"Hurry," she said. "Dinner will be ready as soon as I've shaved."

I gasped.

"Under my arms, you know," she explained. "It's one of those new dresses without shoulder straps. And if you lift your arms—well, I don't call it decent, do you? I'm so glad you use a safety razor. It's quite easy with a safety, isn't it?"

In my dressing-room I found all my evening clothes laid out on the bed. That's one advantage of being married. As a bachelor, I had had to ransack drawers and hunt for gold studs and discover my dancing pumps and my gloves. It was true that Babette had laid out the wrong white shirt (with the frayed edge) and had chosen the wrong tie; but it was thoughtful of her.

We had a hasty and dishevelled dinner; for, as Babette said, what with dressing and shaving all the

afternoon, she had not had a moment to spare to see to the cooking.

"And besides," she aptly added, "we can make up at supper, can't we?"

I did not enjoy that dance. Of course, with Babette, it was different. She still held fast to her illusions, poor child. I was proud enough when this radiant, shimmering thing (with the clean-shaven armpits) put her arm in mine for the first dance; and I had no need to shepherd partners to her programme. She was blockaded with eager youths. At the supper dance, which, of course, we had together, she asked me, as a favour, whether I would greatly mind giving up the other two dances I had still left to me with her.

"You know, dear, you do rag so dreadfully, don't you? And there's a perfectly ideal dancer who suits my steps adorably. And I've only had one dance with him."

"But," I began, "I was looking forward to those dances. It isn't so much the dancing with you that I like. I just wanted to sit out and talk."

"Oh, we can talk when we get home, can't we?" she brightly suggested.

That had not occurred to me before.

"Besides, you know that you're just dying for a smoke," she added.

The irony of that remark was that I really was.

My partners did not attract me. They didn't understand my repartee. They didn't even try to. I discovered then that I had educated Babette up to my sense of humour. It had been a long and sometimes depressing process; but in the end Babette learned always to smile at the right place. And I wasn't going to start the process all over again with each new partner.

The romance of that dance two years before was

missing, too. Then there had been nobody in the ballroom but Babette. Now, she was merely my wife. I recalled, while smoking my cigarette during those two dances she had with the ideal dancer instead of her husband, that two years before she had just as easily slipped up another partner for me. I wasn't married to her then, of course. Those two stolen dances. We had sat them out on some secluded cold steps, the sort of place where one would never think of sitting on a cold night without an overcoat, except at a dance. And I had apologised for kissing Babette on the shoulder.

And this evening I had led Babette to the same cold secluded steps; and, man and wife, we had recalled our first wondrous acquaintance with those steps. I had assured Babette that she was even more delectable as a married woman than she had been two years before; and to prove it I had kissed her passionately on the same bare shoulder.

And yet . . . it was the same shoulder, the same Babette, and yet . . . not the same. Or, rather, it *was* the same—that was the trouble. The same shoulder that since I had so often lightly kissed. The thrill had got worn off. I wasn't kissing anything but skin.

But Babette never noticed the difference. She adorably thrilled. I was thankful that, at least, for her, the romance had not been shaven off.

And there was not the same fun in seeing Babette home. How well I remembered the first time I had seen her home! And how long we had taken to say good-night in the cleverly shaded porch! And how hungry I felt afterwards! Well . . . You can't have your cake and eat it. But I had not my cake, and I had not even eaten it. Marriage had eaten it.

When we got home, Babette made me unhook her. To my surprise there was no difficulty about that.

There were no hidden hooks, no cast-iron rivets, no taut tapes. I untied a tiny ribbon bow, detached a few flimsy hooks and five pins, and the filmy dress simply flowed to her feet. And there she stood, a charming boy! For she had adopted the newest fashion. She had dispensed with everything else. She stood, alluring, in silk tights and open-work. She looked as if she had just stepped from beneath the shower.

"I say," I asked in consternation, "is that all you had on at the dance?"

"Of course," she smiled. "Didn't I look smart?"

"Yes, but. . . . Just that slip of a flimsy dress over You—nothing between You and nakedness but that thin wrap? Were all the other——?"

"Of course," she smiled; "but surely you knew?"

I confessed that I had had my suspicions. I had noticed that, despite the new cling or cinch in modern dancing, no corsets had stuck their jagged ends into me. And with some of my partners I had the feeling that I was waltzing with a jelly-fish. Not altogether an unpleasant feeling. But . . . only a flimsy covering between respectability and a bathing costume!

It wasn't as if there was any real need for any of the women to uncover themselves any further. Even in Babette's full dress costume there was a considerable amount of undisguised Babette on view. Her head was thickly covered with hair and pad. Then there was a wide strata of uncovered face and neck and shoulder and bosom and back. Then, how held up I do not know, began the top of Babette's evening gown. This discreetly continued to her ankles, but was so tightly built that, in order to allow her to dance, the costumier had mercifully provided a slit to the knee. And even her knee was rather chillingly clad; for she wore the open-workest of open-work stockings,

guaranteed to last at least one dance without dissolving into nothingness. And now that she had flowed out of her gown—it weighed nine ounces—Babette, though still presumably full clothed, gave me a spotted effect of Babette and lace—mostly Babette.

“That is why I asked you to watch me in the second dance,” she explained. “This skirt is so difficult to lift. I’d hate to let people see too much of me. You wouldn’t like it yourself, you know. Still, you needn’t have signalled so publicly. Was I holding it very high?”

“I saw your knee.”

“Really,” she sighed, contemplating the nubbiest knee in Pagandom, “my dressmaker should have been more careful. Positively indecent, I call it. Still, what’s the use of an expensive dress if it isn’t smart?”

It was with a sigh of relief that she discarded her bathing-dress for her night-dress. . . . Her night-dress was warmer, less like wire-netting.

“I wonder,” I mused, “if women are ever really comfortable except when they’re in bed?”

“How could we be comfortable with all those things on?” she replied, stretching herself cosily in bed.

I climbed into bed.

“I didn’t enjoy it the teeniest bit,” she sighed. “Dances used to be so awtully exciting; but that was before we were married, wasn’t it? You know, a girl goes to a dance filled with the most impossible hopes. She never knows what nice man she might meet; she doesn’t even know which of her two favourite partners will see her home. I always arranged to have two men madly devoted to me at every dance I went to. One by himself was rather a nuisance. But now, I’m married. I know who will take me home. I even know how he looks when he takes his teeth out. Of

course," she cuddled me penitently, "I wouldn't be single again for worlds. There was that Grace Browne there to-night; she's been going to dances long before I came out, and she's getting haggard now with hoping. But, after all, it's for the Grace Brownes that dances were invented. They're not for married women, are they? There's no excitement in them. It's all different, isn't it? Marriage, I mean?"

So Babette had had her little ideals, too! I was startled, hurt.

"You mean that you're disappointed?"

"Not exactly disappointed . . . disillusioned perhaps."

"I've been a failure as a husband," I said, bitterly.

"Oh, no! It's not you; it's marriage that has been a failure."

"Our marriage, Babette?"

"No, dear. Not you, not me; but just marriage. *Any* marriage—*every* marriage. There's something wrong in it. It isn't what it's been cracked up to be, is it? I suppose it's those novelists. I was a silly little fool. All girls are. We don't know, you see. And there's only one way of finding out; and when we do find out, it isn't what we expected; but we've got to make the best of it. Even when there was nothing to find out, after all. . . . Oh, well!

"But it changes us, smears us over with ordinariness. To-night, for instance . . . I liked dancing with you," she nicely conceded; "but I didn't get the thrill. And when you took me out to sit on those same cold steps—I was hoping, longing that you would—and you kissed me on the shoulder; it seemed rather a silly thing for you to do—that is, for a husband to do. I'm sorry, dreadfully sorry, dear, but I couldn't feel that kiss. It didn't tingle all through me, and trickle up and down my spine, and burn me right through. And

all the time I was thinking how cold those steps were—and how cold I was.”

“Babette!” I cried, shocked.

Her voice was penitent. “Oh, I know you felt just the same, you old darling; and I couldn’t have disillusioned you; so I pretended, for your sake, that it was just the same as the first time. That first kiss on my shoulder shook me like an earthquake. I pretended that I was hurt and scandalised; but the only thing I worried about was whether the rubbed-off powder would show when we got back to the ball-room. That was why I made you sit out another—to give the red mark time to disappear. And you didn’t give it a chance! But, really, I didn’t care. I was proud, tremendously proud. But to-night . . . well, what’s a shoulder to kiss when you’re able and allowed to kiss Me—all of me?”

There was nothing else for me to do. I kissed Most of Babette. But it didn’t make any difference. We were married.

“Do you know,” she said, quite calmly—I could feel her heart against my arm beating with a serene, unhurried steadiness—“I had all sorts of wonderful ideals about marriage; and they’re all smeared over. Once you kissed me every morning at breakfast; once, you remember”—I didn’t—“when we were both eating poached eggs—and I loved it. But you’ve not kissed me at breakfast since last August—August the third. And—oh, what’s the use? We’re married. Marriage has got us. That’s all.”

So there it was. The electroplate was wearing off.

“Oh, I love you, of course,” she went on; “but in a married way. And I wouldn’t be single again for anything. But I made the mistake about marriage that all girls make. I thought it would be exciting, but it isn’t. It’s dull.”

“ Marriage is dull,” I assented soberly. “ But it’s a pleasant sort of dullness, isn’t it? ”

Babette sighed. “ A happy, contented sort of dullness.”

She snuggled desperately closer.

DIALOGUE NINE

HOW TO GET ENGAGED

"Sentence of Imprisonment for the Term of Your Natural Life: 'This is So Sudden!'"—*The Babette Birthday Book*.

STRANGE how one gets used to things when one is married! Even when one is married to Babette!

That night Babette did not hear my knock on her bedroom door, and I entered her room to discover my wife at that interesting, if somewhat draughty, stage of a woman's disrobing when she is chiefly corset. Unwittingly I viewed a panorama of Babette's back. Now, the landscape of Babette's back-view is a subject for sonnets, an excuse for lyrical rhapsodies. By a complicated arrangement of mirrors, Babette even manages to admire it herself. But to me, her husband, that night it did not contribute even a thrill. All I noted was that my wife, since her marriage, had begun to put on flesh. The map had been drawn on a larger scale.

Of course, I admired Babette's figure. Even an archbishop would admire it. At any rate, Babette did, in addition to three dentists, two doctors and nine shopwalkers. It is a harassing experience for a woman to have so beautiful a figure as Babette. That was why Babette was always changing her dentists and her doctors. They *would* admire her figure. And she could rarely shop in the same department of a shop twice.

Babette was quite frank about it to me. She always repeated exactly what the dentist or the curate had said—or, rather, what he hadn't said, but what he had looked. Sometimes I have thought that perhaps Babette was the teeniest bit to blame. Unconsciously, I gently put it to her, she might have given them some encouragement. But she indignantly replied that she couldn't alter her figure; no encouragement would suppress the least of her curves. No, she had just to suffer the adoration she invariably inspired. She bore up under it heroically, uncomplainingly. But the stopping of one tooth of hers brought me in three dentists' bills. "You see," she pathetically explained, "when you're lying back in a dentist's chair, you're so helpless, aren't you?"

That explained to me why dentistry is such a popular profession. I have often wished since that I had been a dentist. Or a shop-walker. And the number of curates who called to save Babette's soul—of course, she hadn't a soul—proved to me that there was a great deal of earnestness hidden within the collar that buttons at the back. Several curates, not finding Babette's soul on the surface, had tried to reach it by squeezing Babette's hand, or looking for it in the depths of Babette's soulful eyes. Babette found that it was almost as harassing not to have a soul as to have a luscious figure.

But this night I found myself admiring Babette's back in a purely artistic sense. I didn't rush to her and rapturously kiss her corset laces. It was a very cold night, so I merely slipped into bed. That is to say, I merely wound the clock, removed the pillow-shams, gathered up Babette's scattered hairpins, turned back the coverlet without creasing it, arranged the blinds, placed the matches handy, tidied up the floor, shook her pillow up, and slipped into bed.

Babette was certainly plumper. Not Fatter—that word is never mentioned in married life. When I first met Babette she was of that slight, ethereal, willowy, bendable, convenient build that allows you to clasp most of her with one arm, leaving the other hand free to adjust her chin. Now it required two arms—not that it mattered at all, since now there was no need for adjusting her chin. It adjusted itself automatically. Marriage had hurled Babette, as it hurls most women, from one horn of woman's dilemma to the other. Every slight woman wants to be fat; every plump woman wails to be scraggy. None of them will ever admit that she is just right.

When I fervently told Babette that I liked her at her married weight—instead of being in the feather-weight class, she could qualify as a middleweight—she pathetically sighed. The more of her there was the more of her I had to love. Cubically she was 18 per cent. more lovable. She said that she hated statistics.

So now, observing Babette's geographical extent, I thrilled merely æsthetically. I contemplated contours with a mere town-planner's enthusiasm. And Babette did not seem to mind. She simply didn't care. She did not even miss the usual kiss. Strange!

"Do you know, Babette," I said, when she had joined me in bed and snuggled herself comfortable, "I was just thinking how strange it is that I've grown used to you."

"Well, if marriage won't make us used to each other, what's it for, anyway?" she laughed.

"Yes, but before we were married, you were utterly mysterious to me, wonderful and strange—all women were. And you were so different to all other women."

"And now," she almost sighed, "I'm just like all the others."

"No. But through you I seem to have discovered all the rest of you. A wife is like a dictionary to an unknown language—the language of woman. And before our marriage, all of you were so hard to understand . . . and you were untranslatable."

"And now you know me off by heart?"

"Yes, that's the finest thing about it. It's like learning a new language—a great, wonderful language."

But Babette, thinking in her own language, dropped from abstractions to ourselves.

"Those first few months!" she sighed. "Why can't we have them all over again? You were so wonderful, so different. I used to be actually shy before you. I used to flush when I even thought of you! I used even to be afraid of you!"

"And now?"

Babette laughed—the confident laugh of achievement. "You're only a child, after all—a little, clumsy child, that has got to be humoured and petted and put up with. And once you were a hero! Dear old thing!" And she slipped a happy kiss on to my cheek. It was almost a contemptuous kiss—most married kisses are.

"But those first few months!" she went on. "How excited I was that evening we were introduced! Fancy me getting excited over you now!"

"What I think, when I look back," I said, "is the sheer luck of meeting you at all. I hate 'evenings.' It was the merest chance that I went that night. I didn't know Kitty very well. I didn't like her much. And yet she invited me to her evening. Why? And it happened that you were there that night—though you weren't often there. And then we were introduced. Kitty introduced us just as she introduced any ordinary persons."

"Oh, no," said Babette, from the depths of her woman's knowledge. "No girl ever introduces a man

to a girl without a hope that something will come of it."

"But our meeting, casually like that, was wonderful, wasn't it?"

It was wonderful, Babette agreed, but not so wonderful in the way I meant. "You and I were bound to meet somehow, somewhere."

"That's true. Nothing could have kept us apart. But it wasn't mere chance. There must be a purpose in the world, after all."

And yet, as I uttered this platitude, I felt mean. For, looking back on my courtship of Babette, I saw, in all its hideousness, the long procession of meanesses and deceptions that I had practised upon innocent Babette. The course of true love never runs smooth; but ours had—because I had dug, unsuspected by her, my own channel for that stream. I had deliberately imposed upon Babette's maiden ignorance; I had taken unfair advantage of her beautiful trustfulness. And the fact that I loved her was no excuse; it merely made my perfidy the more horrible. I could love her and yet mislead her. I could make her my wife under false pretences.

That first evening, when I had met her at Kitty's "evening," my long course of deviousness began. When by the merest chance we found ourselves temporarily isolated in that cosy corner of the verandah—and how beautiful my Babette had looked against the cushions that so miraculously matched her dress!—I had lied to her. I had told her I hated music, and though I knew she was yearning to go back with me to the singing in the drawing-room, she had politely stayed out there with me. I don't know what Kitty said to her afterwards; it was Kitty's "evening" and Babette was her show guest, and the dear angel allowed me to monopolise her in that selfish way, though I could see

she was thinking of that other chap, John. And, as I soon found out, John was in love with her all the time.

Later, though Babette tried not to let me see, I discovered that she was seeing quite a lot of John. Decent fellow, too; but he did not understand Babette as I did. Women complex? Why, the ordinary man can see right through a woman, if he only looks into her eyes. Poor innocent child, she was deeply troubled about John. He loved her as much as I did; but he did not understand her crystal innocence as I did. And she was wavering; yes, she had confessed it before we were married; and if I had not proposed at the very time I did, I believe I should have lost her. That is where the man who understands woman beats the fellow who doesn't mix his adoration with masculine guile. Poor Babette, I reflected, as I felt her soft arm beneath my neck, I had won her, and she was happy; but one doesn't get into matrimony, any more than one gets into politics, with clean hands. Well, I would make up to her. The end had justified the means.

Yes, my love for her had been rather mixed. Like a cocktail, all sorts of things were in it, giving it a flavour, without which Babette would never have drunk the main ingredient of love. That night when, all unsuspecting, she had allowed me to lead her out into the garden at that dance, and, against her better instincts, she had been persuaded to sit out that dance in that summer-house. I could see that she had never been there before—it was such a lonely and unlit summer-house, that I would never have discovered it if a partner earlier in the evening had not taken me there. Of course, I knew why that other partner had taken me there—she's married now—and I had kissed her according to the conventions of sitting-out in

lonely summer-houses; but that girl would have been surprised if she had known that in the act of kissing her—in her struggles, of course, she slid on to my knee—I was merely thinking what a lovely place it was for me to kiss Babette in. It was a kind of dress rehearsal; and I needed one, because I hadn't then kissed Babette at all. That girl had been well rehearsed.

And then I led the unsuspecting Babette to the slaughter-house. Poor child, she must have had a vague suspicion of me, for at first she refused to come there, but I over-persuaded her, and she entered its darkness supremely trusting in my honour. And then I kissed her—not in the least as successfully as I had kissed that other girl. But then Babette was innocent; that other girl was different. Babette struggled; the other girl had struggled, too; but it was easy to see that that girl's struggle was only pretence. It was her method of getting on to my knee, so that I could kiss her more comfortably. Yet my rehearsal was of use, even in Babette's case, for, when she struggled I managed to draw her on to my knee, and kissed her more comfortably. I dare say that to this day she had no suspicion how she came to be sitting in that position, with her lips so easily accessible. Yet, lying there, in bed, conscious of Babette's delicious nearness, I felt mean. It was by such guile that I had got her to share with me that double bed.

Even my proposal I had arranged with a diabolical cunning. I had picked out the very spot a week before, and I had arranged that she and I would be there on a certain evening. I will admit that chance favoured me. If Babette's shoe-lace hadn't happened to come unloosed just as we were passing that shady spot, it would have been somewhat difficult to suggest that we should sit down beneath that tree without raising her suspicions. But I would have made her

stop, anyway. And when I deliberately kissed her; and, as I had foreseen, she was shocked—for she had told me I must never, never again, etc., and I had faithfully sworn that I never would. That was the one condition she had insisted upon when I asked her to come to that concert. (We never got to that concert.)

Then I humbly apologised. But, instead of Babette forgiving me, as she regularly used to—really, though she did not analyse her sensations, she liked me to kiss her, but wouldn't admit the shameful fact to herself, and, naturally, I never let her see that I knew—this night she actually got angry, and said she'd go straight home if I couldn't behave as I had faithfully promised. But I grovelled before her, and at last she forgave me and even kissed me in token of her forgiveness—a light touch of a butterfly's wing, not a real kiss at all. And we sat down on a bank, and I pointed out to her in a dispassionate way that the grass might be wet—though, goodness knows (though I didn't, then) that she had more thicknesses of clothing on just there than I had. So I got her quite unsuspectingly to sit on my knee, and then I worked up another quarrel, I forget about what. I wanted the delicious happiness of making it up again. When a woman is magnanimously forgiving you, she is so much more easy to manage. This evening she felt so magnanimous that her sisterly kiss tremulously melted into the other kind, and before I had really thought out what I was going to say I said it. The moment I had done it I knew I had made a mistake. I shouldn't have rushed things like that. I should have gently led up to the subject, instead of blurting out my proposal and shocking Babette. She was awfully surprised.

Of course, with my knowledge of woman, I should

have expected that; but I was in love with Babette; I knew she liked me, and I suppose I forgot how sudden my declaration must have seemed to her innocent soul. I had made no allowance for her appalling ignorance of her own heart. I had gathered that, in a shy, frightened way, she might have looked mistily into the future and vaguely considered the possibility that some time I might like her enough to marry her; but, being a woman, she was content just to go on being friends, happy in the present. I overlooked that in my state of mind, and risked more than I knew in proposing so soon. Three months later she might have been more prepared; but I could not have wasted three months.

Luckily it turned out all right. It is true that she did not give me my answer that night. She was too much affected by the shock to make any definite promise. But she admitted that she liked me, oh, very much . . . but, as a husband . . . that, of course, was a bigger thing. We compromised by the arrangement that I was to consider myself engaged to her, and she was to give the matter of her engagement to me every earnest consideration. And I loved her the more for taking it so seriously.

My thoughts had kept me silent. I looked to see whether Babette had fallen asleep. But she was wide awake, evidently thinking, too.

"No," I said, taking up the discussion where I had left it. "it wasn't chance that brought us together. There must be a purpose in the world."

"I've been thinking, too," my wife gravely said, "there *was* a purpose that brought us together." She hesitated a moment. Then I felt her body stiffen itself, as if she had taken a great resolution. "There was a purpose—*my* purpose."

"Your purpose?" I asked, in surprise.

"Yes; I had made up my mind to meet you."

"But you didn't know me. You'd never seen me."

"I had heard about you."

"But who——?"

"Kitty. She told me about you a week before. She rang me up, and told me that she had met such a nice sort of man—just the sort of man, she said, that would suit me."

"So it was all a put-up job?" I blankly said.

"That sort of thing always is."

"Well, at any rate, Kitty was self-sacrificing, wasn't she?"

Babette spoke sharply. "Why, *did* you?"

"No," I admitted. "I just liked her."

"I know. Kitty told me herself. She said she had given you a chance; but she saw at once that she wasn't your sort. So, after giving you a fair trial, she had begun to look about for some one else."

"For me? I like that!"

"No, for herself. But she thought it would be a pity to waste you—you were just the sort that would be snapped up by a silly pretty face. And though I wasn't her best friend, she knew that I adored deep blue eyes and large hands; so she thought it would be worth while giving me a chance. She told me she knew all about you, described you—though her description wasn't half nice enough; and so we fixed it all up. I went to see her that evening, and we discussed the best way of meeting you. So much depends on a first impression, doesn't it? At first she thought of a tennis-party; but I'm such a fool at tennis, and a tennis costume doesn't give my neck and shoulders a fair chance. And I get so hot at tennis, and the powder comes off. So I stuck out for evening dress. At first we thought of a theatre-party; but at a theatre you've got to waste so much time pretending to listen to the

play, haven't you? And there's too much profile in the stalls seats; and I'm not exactly proud of my profile. A dance would have been the ideal thing, of course; but there wasn't a dance in sight for a fortnight.

"And I was feeling very lonely. I'd just refused John—this time finally; and the poor dear was taking it rather seriously. And I'd got so to depend on him taking me about and giving me afternoon tea in town and paying my tram-fares, that I felt quite miserable and lost. A man doesn't understand how lonely a girl feels when she hasn't got some one hopelessly in love with her. I had that feeling more than once since I came out—once it lasted for nearly two months. I was just on the point of writing him a nice, motherly letter, telling him how sorry I was for him, but that I could never, never—you know, just enough encouragement to keep him on the string, and suggesting that though I could never, never . . . I'd be at home the following evening, when Kitty rang up about you. So it had to be an evening, though I hate evenings. I can't carry on conversation with a crowd, unless it's a crowd of one. Kitty and I spent an afternoon making out a list of the invited. I insisted on John being asked. He couldn't help showing that he loved me, and you couldn't help seeing it. And if we didn't like each other, he would be so useful to fall back upon. And I wouldn't let Kitty invite that Pearson girl, though she is Kitty's best friend. She's pretty, of course, but she's got those gentle, appealing ways, and I wouldn't trust any man when those appealing ways are attached to a figure that has appealing ways, too."

"But," I said, "it was your appealing ways and your figure's appealing ways that got me."

"Exactly," Babette agreed. "That Pearson girl is too much like me for me not to see through her. Well, at any rate, I saved you from her."

"And saved her from me," I laughed.

"Yes. Well, we fixed it up for that Thursday. Kitty thought I ought to have a new dress, but I decided to wear my old pink. You see, it would be new to you, and I could keep the new dress for the first dance we went to. Besides, the pink hadn't any shoulder-straps, either."

"I remember."

"And wasn't it lucky? The moment I saw you I liked you."

"But you never showed it in the least, Babette."

"I should think not. I couldn't be as immodest as that. But Kitty knew that moment. But it didn't matter about me. The main thing was that you let me see you liked me."

"Do you know, Babette," I wondered, "I can't remember what we talked about that first wonderful evening. And we must have talked quite a lot."

"Oh, just conversation. Silly questions and answers. We had to do something to keep our eyes from blurring out the truth. All the time I was wondering how it would feel when you kissed me."

"But I didn't kiss you that evening."

"Oh, yes, you did. I invented that kiss while we were chatting."

I was surprised. I had invented that kiss, too, while we were chatting. I told Babette, and she sighed happily.

"If I'd only known, then," she added, "it would have saved me so much worry afterwards. There were times when I even thought that you didn't love me."

"You couldn't have!" I said.

"Oh, I knew you loved me; but what I wasn't quite sure of was whether you loved me enough—enough to marry me."

"I see. But, all the same, it was luck that we were left alone in the corner of that verandah while the others were singing, wasn't it?"

"Not luck," smiled Babette; "good management. Kitty is a splendid manager. Of course, I had to pay her. She whispered to me as I was leaving that she was going to be my chief bridesmaid."

"And she was."

"Yes; but it wasn't all plain sailing for Kitty or me. Often we miserably wondered whether there was going to be a wedding at all. You were so slow, weren't you?"

"Was I?" I asked in surprise.

"Jim Hastings beat you by three weeks, and even John came up to scratch ten days before you, and regularly every fortnight after that till I switched him off."

"But when I did speak you said——"

" 'This is so sudden,' " Babette laughed.

"No," I protested.

"Well, something that meant the same thing. All girls do. What I really said to myself was, 'Thank goodness, that's over.' All girls do. We have to pretend. All love-making is pretence, isn't it? That's the fun of it. Suppose I had known from the first that you meant to marry me, and suppose you had known from the first that I meant you to marry me, where would the excitement have come in?"

"I see," I slowly said. "It would have been just as dull as being married."

"Exactly," Babette smilingly agreed. "Love is only a game, and has to be played by the rules. The lucky thing is that every girl knows the rules off by heart. Do you remember that night we sat out a dance, and I ruined a new pair of satin slippers walking with you in the wet grass? I didn't mind that. I

knew that you'd pay me back when we were married. A girl has to make sacrifices, hasn't she? Well, when you suggested that we might as well sit the dance out in the garden, I knew you wanted to kiss me—but I didn't let you see that I wanted you to kiss me. If I had you wouldn't have. So I wouldn't go to that shady summer-house. I'd been there the dance before. I'd manoeuvred my partner to take me there, just to see if it was a safe place for you to kiss me in—and the poor man mistook himself for you. Perhaps I was to blame—a little. It was a kind of dress rehearsal, but it was a bit too realistic for me. I had to powder up again before I came to you."

"But you did go there," I reminded her.

"Of course, you stupid. After having the dress rehearsal. But didn't my reluctance to go make you all the more eager to go? And, goodness me, when you did kiss me, how shocked I was!"

"I felt a brute the minute I had done it," I admitted.

"I wanted to grovel to you."

"I was shocked, really. Shocked at the bungle you had made of that kiss. But I daren't have helped you. I had to dodge. Silly, wasn't it? And I had to pretend to be tremendously angry with you. But at last I pardoned you, and just to show you that I trusted you, I made you sit down by me. And then, of course, you tried again. And I struggled."

"Pretence," I said bitterly. "But how I loved to feel you struggling in my arms."

"And how I loved you holding me!" Babette snuggled nearer. "That's why I struggled so determinedly. And then somehow—to this day I can't tell how I managed it so well—in my efforts to escape I found myself on your knee. And neither of us admitted even to ourselves that I was sitting on your knee."

"Pretence!" I sighed.

"Glorious pretence!" Babette cried. "And the more I struggled the more comfy I was making myself on your knee. And, quite by accident, my lips found yours—you were so clumsy I had to help you—and I quite forgot to take them away."

"And nobody mentioned it," I mournfully smiled.

"That wasn't exactly the right time for conversation, was it? That sort of silence is golden."

"And then, at last, I asked you to kiss me back," I reminded her.

"And I sternly refused, didn't I? As if there was any beginning or end of that sort of kiss, or as if I wasn't doing my full share all the time. A kiss isn't a kiss unless both help. Nobody could possibly tell exactly where your kiss ended or mine began."

"I didn't want to," I reminded Babette.

My wife sighed happily. "Oh, isn't it lovely to be able to confess like this. It's like taking off a new corset. There's such a sense of relief in just letting yourself flow over."

"Well," I spurred her, "while you're confessing, you might tell me the truth about John. I was frightfully jealous of John."

"Oh, John!" Babette paused. I had a dim suspicion that she was sorting out the things that she might tell me about John and the things that it would only worry me to know. "Oh, I only used John to shake you up. You were so slow. You don't know how self-sacrificing a girl has to be if she wants to get married. I wasted three weeks over John—and except when he's proposing we haven't a single subject in common. Luckily, he was always proposing, so I wasn't very bored."

"If it hadn't been for John," I mused, "I wonder . . . ?"

"I often wonder, too," said Babette, simply. "But I couldn't have been so happy."

Having given her the usual kiss, and got from her a quite unusual kiss in return, I went on. "But everything wasn't pretence. That night I proposed!"

"Did you?" Babette sedately asked.

"Of course—otherwise it's hardly moral for you to be here."

"But tell me, dear, frankly. You didn't mean to propose that particular night, did you?"

"Of course. I arranged it all."

"Really!" Babette seemed surprised.

"You see, I had made up my mind that that sort of thing couldn't go on for ever."

"What sort of thing?"

"Cuddling you for hours every second evening."

"I often wished it would," Babette sighed. "But both Kitty and I agreed that it was just a phase, pleasant to linger over, but a waste of time unless it led to business. Kitty and I often talked it over. You see, there are limits to the area of a nice girl a young man is allowed to kiss, and sometimes it seemed to me that you had reached those limits."

I dared not hint that sometimes it had seemed to me, afterwards, that different interpretations might have been put by other people upon the legal limits.

Babette, perhaps, had the same thought. She sighed reminiscently. "I used to powder inches lower those evenings. But it wasn't wrong, surely?"

"Nice, but not naughty," I agreed.

"I told Kitty that it was all right—quite conventional in fact, if you were going to marry me. Kitty said that that was just the point. Were you or weren't you? She said that you had seen enough of me to decide. You know, you did see a good deal of me, didn't you? And I liked you to. Shameless of me,

wasn't it? But I'm married now, and can tell the truth. So Kitty and I arranged that you'd propose to me that week. We fixed upon the night you were going to take me to the concert."

"That night?" I gasped.

"Well, it came off all right," Babette laughed. "Everything went swimmingly, didn't it?"

"But," I sternly asked, "let us be quite clear. You mean to say that you arranged for me to propose that night?"

"Of course—but Kitty helped with suggestions. That was why I wanted to know whether you had fixed on that night, independently, too? Or whether any other night would have suited you as well . . . or whether you hadn't decided to propose at all?"

"I meant to propose that night," I sternly asserted. "I arranged everything."

"What a coincidence!" Babette cried. "Fancy the whole three of us fixing on the same night! You're right, there *is* a purpose in this world. But what a lot of worry it would have saved Kitty and me if we'd only known! And how it would have relieved you if you had only known! There's so much pretence in love, isn't there? And fancy you picking out the same tree to propose under that Kitty and I had selected! It makes you almost believe in the God of Love."

"Yes," I said savagely; "but how would you have got me to propose if I hadn't suggested our going under that tree? I might not have stopped. I might just have taken you straight to the concert."

"Oh, Kitty and I arranged all that. Don't you remember my shoe lace had come undone, and I asked you to tie it up—though I certainly didn't ask you to smooth my stocking while you were about it. I had carefully untied that lace before we started. And

then . . . and then I pretended that I was shocked, and made you apologise. . . . I can always manage a man so much more easily when he's humble. And I got angry and said I'd go straight home if a man wasn't fit to be trusted with a nice girl on a moonlight night in such a lonely spot as that, with no possible chance of anybody interrupting them no matter how he took advantage of her innocence. And I pointed out—that shows how angry I was—that even if you prevented me from going to the concert at all, nobody would know we hadn't been, that practically I was in your power all the evening—which was all the more reason for your behaving yourself and taking no advantage of a trusting girl. And, then, just to show how much I could trust you—just to shame you—I kissed you back in a sisterly way. And then I sat down on the bank, and when you pointed out that the grass might be wet I had to sit on your knee, hadn't I? I had tried that on with another man once before, so that I knew it would work."

"Oh, it worked all right," I said, miserably.

"And then, as things were getting rather slow—and we only had two and a half hours to ourselves—I managed to quarrel with you again."

"What was the quarrel about?" I wanted to know.

"I quite forget. All I know was that every time you made it up you got nicer and more manageable. And then, suddenly, I said to myself, 'Time's up!' and found myself in your arms. And you blurted it out. I won a box of chocolates from Kitty that night. She had bet me it wouldn't happen for another week."

"But you really were surprised," I insisted.

"I was astonished. It was so easy. I could have managed it a month earlier. I had wasted a whole month."

"But why didn't you accept me definitely that night?" I asked.

"And get done with all the excitement in one evening? I wanted it all over again the next night."

"Well, you got it, Babette." My innocent Babette! "Well, as you have been so frank, I don't mind being frank, too. There's a thing I often wanted to tell you. Immediately after I had proposed—I mean, just after you had proposed—for one moment I was afraid. I had done it! And I felt a sickening trickle of fear right down my spine. I had taken the great jump and I hadn't the least idea where I was going to land, or how far down the bottom was. Anyhow, I couldn't get back. And I comforted myself by that thought—that, anyhow, I couldn't get back."

"Did you really feel like that?" Babette curiously asked. "So did I. And here we are," she added happily and sleepily. "It wasn't a bad sort of place we landed on, either . . . this double bed."

DIALOGUE TEN

THE MOODS OF BABETTE

"After all, a Man marries A Harem—and there's room for All Of It in One Night-dress."—*The Babette Birthday Book.*

THE charm of Babette is her variousness. She is sixteen girls in one—and you never really know which.

Every woman is many women : Babette is a complete harem. That is why I married her—to run that harem. But it took me twelve months of marriage with Babette—though it doesn't seem twelve months—to sort out from the motley collection of girls that have gained admittance to my harem the essential Babette beneath them all. And even now there are times when I'm not sure whether I've got her safe in my harem at all, whether she hasn't been outside on the roof all the time, mockingly peering down through the skylight at the man who thought he had caught her.

For Babette is my wife and a saint ; she is an innocent spinster and a widow with seven children and two buried husbands ; she is a woman of the world and an escaped lunatic ; she is a grandmother and an ignorant child ; she is the servant who makes the double bed and the mistress who rumples it ; she is a business partner and a sleeping one ; she is a prude and a twin daughter of joy. I've married a menagerie ; and often I don't quite know whether I'm its owner or inside the cage.

Woman is still in the fluid state. The molten globe took many millions of years to solidify into rocks. The male animal followed slowly after, rising from the jellyfish to the dignity of a backbone after millions of centuries of struggle. He clothed his shivering protoplasm with skin and hide, stiffened it with cartilage and bone, and grew on it fins and tails and scales and teeth and toe-nails. The female admiringly watched him do it, and then pretended to do likewise. But instinctively she preferred the flabby comfort of the imp ancestral jellyfish. She put out a few tender tentacles, which she flourished and wagged as if they were really arms and legs, and in time—some millions of centuries of time—she moulded them so that they really looked like arms and legs. But it was all pretence; underneath that tender skin there were no vertebra, no muscles—only the protoplasmic jelly.

Gradually, however, the female found it desirable to imitate the rigidity of the male further, so she supplied her flabby skin with a false epidermis composed of whalebone and steel. This gave a deceptive hardness to her figure, and the male, who sees nothing that the female does not desire him to see—Babette told me of a woman friend of hers who regularly used her husband's razor to shave her legs, and he never connected the fortnightly bluntness of his safety-razor with the fortnightly smoothness of her legs. Well, to get back from the legs of Babette's friend to history, the male never discovered that beneath the corset of the female there isn't anything but a fluid and shapeless mass of protoplasm which, like putty, can be made to take any shape that the female desires.

The ease with which this primitive organism known as woman can melt and remould her form is observable in what is called fashion. Regularly every three months certain manufacturers of dress materials in

Paris—who have to live, like other employers of labour—decide to pour the resilient viscosity of the female into a new mould. And without any fuss all the females in the civilised world flow into their new moulds and emerge a new and surprising shape. Sometimes she has to bulge where you would have thought no human being could have bulged; sometimes she has to be straight where Nature refuses to make even babies straight; sometimes she is almost bisected horizontally; sometimes she is almost bisected perpendicularly; it matters not to woman, the eternal jellyfish; she reduces where she is told to reduce; she becomes concave where once she was pleasingly convex, and gibbous where she was dented.

The mere mass or contour, however, is the least of her variability. Her appurtenances, being as plastic as her tissue, suffer the same seasonable changes. Her hair turns henna in a single night. Her complexion she changes three times a day. She wears one coloured face for breakfast, another for afternoon-sunlight, and a third for electric light. Her lips she wears an exotic scarlet, though to-morrow with equal appropriateness she would as easily wear them purple or orange, or grey and green in stripes. Sometimes she dispenses with her ears, sometimes, though not recently, she has no legs.

But with all these transmogrifications the female has one static quality. Like all primitive organisms, she never grows old. Instead, she grows fat.

But the fluctuations of her body are merely minor permutations compared with the fluctuations of her mind. Her personality is more fluid than her figure. She is Bergson's flux. Chameleon-like her soul takes its colour from her dress. What a difference in mood there is in a married woman in brown and the same woman, a widow in black! Woman is never woman; she is merely temporarily one of her sixteen moods.

Babette was a normal woman. She kept her sixteen moods well oiled. When I first met her I didn't meet her; I met her new-acquaintance mood. She had put it on the moment she had seen me in the distance. She put it on for everybody she saw in the distance. It was a charming, but reserved, mood; a mood that plainly said: "I'm a really nice girl, without an idea of my own, ready to be just the sort of girl that you would like a nice girl to be."

And instantly she set to work to find out the shape of the mould in which unconsciously I cast all nice girls. This took one-tenth of a second, and in another tenth of a second she had decided that she rather liked the shape. Thereupon she shifted to mood number 2. It said: "We're going to be good friends." We were. The next mood was more thoughtful. It said: "I suppose you're single, and I wonder what your income is?" I told her—without knowing that I had told her. Then came mood number 4. It shyly remarked: "No, you mustn't flirt with me—just yet." I didn't—just then.

But there is no need to go on to the 16th mood. Any married man will recall the whole series, and any single man can tick them off with the next nice girl he meets.

Babette's moods, however, did not go in regular order. Some days during our engagement she was alluringly provocative (No. 6), some days petulant (No. 9), some days sulky (No. 12), some days catty (No. 5), some days placid (No. 7). The only cure for all these moods (except No. 7, for which there is no cure) was a course of kisses. And some days she was all these moods together. The consequence was that I met one Babette, kissed another (rather like her), quarrelled with another (that had a horrible family likeness to her), made it up with another (quite

the nicest girl in the family), became good friends with another (rather dull), worshipped another (still more dull), was made frantically jealous by another (a naughty child, too big to slap), was proposed to by another (an adorable being, strangely accessible), married another (an iceberg in a snowstorm), and found myself the husband of sixteen.

The most important business of a newly married man is to study and classify his wife's moods. Until he gets them card-indexed he doesn't know where he is. With Babette, so inexplicably and so swiftly did her moods change, I found this job full of delightful excitement. And one day I made a valuable discovery. There was one important series of Babette's moods that invariably arranged themselves in a certain order. This was the series Nos. 9—16. It ran thus: Petulance, Accusations (a woman must always have somebody to blame when she is at fault—that is why she likes to keep a husband handy), Anger, Sulks, Ice, Explanations (proving that all along she was right), Penitence, Kisses (good and hard).

Married life can be made quite cosy and comfortable as long as your wife does not possess a sense of humour at the wrong moments. It is impossible to preserve the sanctity of marriage if your wife looks on it as a joke. Many a marriage has been wrecked because an otherwise satisfactory wife discovers that a kiss is humorous. Of course it is; but there are certain conventions that are implicit in the promise to love, honour and obey, and the most important is not to laugh in the middle of a married kiss.

Unfortunately Babette possessed, or developed, that particular inconvenient and mis-timed sense of humour. What was the satisfaction in kissing her shoulder before I went to sleep if she laughed? The romance evaporated in that laugh. Babette admitted this

penitently, but said that some nights she couldn't help it. She said that she missed my front teeth, and that a kiss without front teeth was like an egg without salt. As it was obviously inconvenient for me in the middle of the night to get out of bed and fish up my front teeth from the glass of water on the dressing-table, I did not see the humour of her remark. But, thanks to my card-index system of Babette's moods, I discovered that the only occasion when she did not miss the lack of savour in my shoulder-kiss was when we were making up a quarrel (mood number 16). The consequence was that when life threatened to be dull, in order to squash her sense of humour I deliberately provoked a quarrel. For her making-up kiss was an altogether delectable and lingering kiss, not in the least like the common, or breakfast, kiss of married life.

One night, however, I worked the sequence of Babette's moods out, not only to its brilliant conclusion, but, unfortunately, beyond it. I had come home rather late, but ready to be extremely husband-like in compensation for a delayed dinner. But I found Babette in mood 9 (petulance). Luckily I recognised the mood as she opened the door, and I decided to work the series. I casually forgot to bestow the hat-rack kiss—the one that you slip in as you hang up your hat.

She waited a moment, and I saw the delicate mechanism of her moods being set in working order.

"I know," she said, "why you didn't kiss me. You've got that typist's lip-salve on your mouth."

Babette was wrong. The typewriter-girl did not use lip-salve—at least not the sort that comes off. But that made no difference. In mood 10 she had instinctively to blame somebody.

I smiled a tired smile. Mood 11 came to the surface. "O-oh!" she said, "sometimes I'd like to spank you!"

"You dear old dear," I said. "I clean forgot to kiss you; but you look so splendid in your anger that I simply must kiss you now."

"Well, you won't." She sulked (mood 12). "Dinner's stone cold and all spoiled."

"A kiss might give you an appetite," I pleasantly suggested. But mood 12 persisted all through that dinner. In vain I sought to cheer her up by telling her of my day's work at the office, omitting, of course, anything that had happened after office hours. The evening was also sulky; but when I undid her dress at the back—one of the ironies of married life is that no matter how much you want to slap your husband, you must ask him to unhook you—she changed to mood 13 (ice). I had my front teeth in, too.

When I crawled into bed, with my front teeth in, ready for any emergencies, she was still Arctic. Very warm ice to have in the same double bed with you, but warm ice is the worst sort when the iceberg is your wife and as adorably lovable as Babette.

I had to apologise three times before a thaw was faintly perceptible. Babette explained how commendable and long-suffering her conduct had been all through (mood 14). I eagerly accepted her explanation; and mood 15 (penitence) quickly followed. She had been irritable when I came home, and she hadn't cared whether I kissed her or not. But that was all over, thank goodness, and now . . . (mood 16). Kisses, good and hard.

I had worked the series out once again to its triumphant culmination.

"You know, darling," Babette shyly murmured, "you're so much nicer when you kiss me after a quarrel. Your ordinary married peck is quite uninteresting—not at all like this, is it?"

"I was just thinking that it was the same with you—after a quarrel," I meanly said.

"I'm so glad," Babette crowed. "Because I must confess something. I deliberately made you quarrel with me to-night. I was feeling frightfully bored—and it's so long since you really kissed me, isn't it? So I made you quarrel—I could see you didn't want to—and I wouldn't make it up till we got to bed. But it was worth while pretending to quarrel, wasn't it?"

It was. But my classification of the moods of Babette is hopelessly muddled. All the while Babette had concealed another mood—number 17—as yet unclassified.

DIALOGUE ELEVEN

SETTLING DOWN

"The Wedding Breakfast Begins the Romance: the Wedded Breakfast Ends it."—*The Babette Birthday Book.*

EVERY woman is at heart a married woman. So is every man, though he doesn't know it till it is too late—till he is married.

"This marriage business," I murmured to Babette, "is terribly worrying."

We were in our engagement days, when it was occasionally necessary to make a remark between cuddles. Otherwise you can't tell exactly where one cuddle leaves off and the other begins; and the statistics get all muddled.

"Why?" Babette cooed dreamily, reluctantly releasing her lips from my right eye.

"Look at all the married couples we know, dear, and then recollect that we're going to get married ourselves. Doesn't it make you afraid?"

"Surely you don't think that we'll be like them, do you?"

"That's what I'm afraid of. Look at the Brown-Smiths. They're perfectly happy—the ideal marriage everybody calls it. They adore each other, they're wrapped up in each other."

"Well, so are we," Babette reminded me. "No people could be more wrapped up in each other than we are now."

There are several ways in which a nice girl can sit on a man's knee; but Babette's long experience of sitting on male knees had eliminated all the awkwardness of that position, and her figure so adapted itself to the pose that it required some ingenuity to unwrap ourselves. On this occasion I did not try.

"But how obviously they love each other," I went on, after having gently but firmly freed my lips. Babette had at that time a fixed belief that lips were not made for talking. "They've no time for anybody but themselves; and how dull they are!"

"Bromides!" said Babette. "But we'll never be like them."

"Still, look at the others. There's the Smith-Browns. They've been married only three years and you'd think they had been born married. Their conversation consists of married remarks—silly matrimonial jokes that they understand, and nobody else does; they haven't an interest beyond their home. And there are the Smith-Smiths and the Brown-Browns—they're all the same."

"But you can't compare them with us," Babette cried. "They're just dull conventional people who've done the usual conventional thing. To them marriage is just marriage; but to us, dear, marriage is going to be a continual adventure. They've all settled down. That's all. But we're never going to settle down."

I hopefully agreed with her; and we settled down for a quarter of an hour. . . .

"Fancy comparing us with that frumpy lot!" Babette took advantage of the cramp in my left leg to remark.

"And yet," I said, "perhaps Mrs. Brown-Smith made the same remark before she married."

"Well, it all comes of settling down. And I'm not

going to settle down. I mean to be just the same to you when I'm your wife as I am now."

I hoped not, but there are reticences, even between engaged couples.

"And you must promise," she went on, "to be just the same to me when you're my husband."

"All that, and more!" I said.

Babette kissed me. Sometimes Babette is extraordinarily intelligent.

"We won't be commonplace. Most wives I know are just wives. They don't take the slightest interest in their husband's business. And look how I love to hear all about your work!"

My business was—and still is—to dictate a series of business letters concerning buttons. The firm in whose office I occupy a responsible post manufactures buttons. It makes other things, too, like hooks and eyes; but my department is devoted solely to buttons. I served my apprenticeship as a junior clerk in the button department of the office; and gradually, as I extended my knowledge of the sale of buttons, I rose to my present position. This is the age of specialisation; and, though I had chances in the hook and eye selling department, I sternly refused to consider them. A man who knows buttons as I know them will always command a steady salary.

And in those engagement days I used to fill in the necessary pauses between more serious preoccupations with information upon buttons. It was a subject that appealed to Babette's woman's heart. She grew quite romantic about buttons.

"It brings us so close together, doesn't it?" she used to exclaim, forgetting that no button could have brought us closer than we usually were.

"And when we're really married," she went enthusiastically on, "you must take me to your office.

I'd love to see the place where you toil all day, so that I could picture you slaving away for little me when I'm at home by myself. And I could go as your wife, couldn't I? Even in office hours. And you must show me your desk where you dictate your clever letters. And you must tell me all about the clerks—is she fair or dark? ”

“ Who? ”

“ The woman you dictate your letters to? ”

“ Oh, her! I've never noticed. Something mousey or mud colour, I think. But if you like I'll look carefully to-morrow, and let you know.”

“ Oh, no, you needn't,” Babette hastily answered. “ If she saw you looking at her she might think you were interested in her.”

“ Interested in her, when I've got you! ” I laughed.

But nevertheless I became interested. She had quite a nice mouth and chin, I found.

So, two inexperienced navigators, who knew less of each other than they did of the great ocean they were about to explore, we planned and perfected our equipment. In our frail new boat we, with our beautiful innocence and our glorious confidence, were going to avoid the shoals on which, all around our horizon, other ships as badly found and as incompetently captained had run hopelessly aground. But in our few intervals of sanity—even engaged couples have such fleeting intervals (when he is wondering at the street corner why she is so late, or when she is wearying because he has not written)—in these few intervals Fear battened on our dear hopes. So many millions of ships had as bravely set sail, and though we found few that had gone to the bottom, broken in two on some cruel reef (like a chorus girl or a lodger), many were ashore in the mud (breakfast 365 times a year), many becalmed (afternoon teas and bridge), and some

so covered by the barnacles of dullness that they would assuredly never reach the port so confidently announced.

Yet, with all these sailings in the past, surely we had in ourselves some inherited instinct that would guide us aright?

How bravely, through the mist of confetti, we started off! Those first cosy evenings, after we had crossed the bar of the honeymoon, when sitting in our drawing-room, Babette, my wife, told me so humorously of her difficulties with her maids. We kept only one—one at a time; the plural justifies itself. And she would sit, just as I had pictured her, daintily darning my socks, while I smoked the new pipe she had chosen for me—in the privacy of our home was the only place where I could smoke it without causing an obstruction of the footpath—and told her the most thrilling of the events of my day at the office. Sometimes I brought home to her copies of letters that I had dictated about buttons. One of them Babette insisted on keeping. She thought the phraseology so beautiful. It was, too. And I am amazed to find how brilliant were her suggestions about the business of selling buttons. She would have made a great success in the button department.

In the intervals between maids, I used to help Babette to wash up the dinner things. How we enjoyed that picnicking, as we called it, in the scullery! And what fun we had over Babette's cooking, and how clever she was always to have in stock tinned herrings to fall back upon!

Then one night when I came home tired out with a big order for buttons, and found that my dinner wouldn't be ready for an hour, I admit I got rather irritable, and sharply asked Babette why she could not manage to keep her maids more than a week at a time? She replied that I was a brute. I mentioned

that if I could manage my department of the office so capably, why couldn't she manage one maid? And she informed me that she didn't ever want to hear another word about my tin-pot office.

The washing up that night wasn't at all like a picnic.

We made it up, of course, in the double bed; that is what a double bed is for. But after that I found that Babette wasn't in the least interested in the button trade, and that her enthusiasm for darning my socks had been transferred to her own hats.

There was, therefore, nothing for me to do but to refuse to discuss my business affairs with my wife, and to take up a book when Babette began upon hats.

"I was thinking," Babette remarked one night as we lay in bed, "we don't entertain enough. Suppose we ask the Brown-Smiths down to dine some evening, and we could have a little game of bridge afterwards? Our evenings, with just you and me, are so dull, aren't they?"

"The Brown-Smiths!" I echoed. "But they're so horribly married."

"Well, so are we."

"Are we?" I asked in dismay. Looking back at that evening—which was just like any other evening—I had to admit that Babette was right. "But we were going to be so different," I reminded her.

"It's no use," Babette sighed, "we can't. Nobody can. There's something in marriage that gets you down. If you're married, you're married, and that's the end of it—and of you. I've tried to keep up with my old girl friends—we were such friends before you married me"—Babette almost accused me of marrying her—"but I can't get intimate with an unmarried girl. They're so ignorant and so—so romantic. They look

on men as if they were something superhuman. Why, Elsie Janaway looks up to you as if you were a god! Fancy! I used to think her so sensible. And there are so many subjects that you can't discuss with unmarried girls, and so many married stories that you've got to explain the point to them? I feel like a teacher in a Sunday school."

This set me thinking. Looking over my friends I found that I had rather lost interest in the unmarried ones. They seemed, these young fellows, so irresponsible, so happy-hearted, so free! And they looked on girls, too, with a curious admiration mixed with an incomprehensible awe. Now, there is nothing awesome or specially admirable in women—even Babette I had gradually discovered, was, in many ways, just a woman.

"Yes, marriage does open your eyes," Babette went on. "I used to think Mrs. Brown-Smith hopelessly stodgy and married; but now that I'm married too I find I get on with her so well. There's so many things we have to talk about—comparing husbands. Every married woman is interesting as soon as you start comparing husbands. And you soon find out that no matter how different you thought your husband from all the other husbands, all husbands are the same husband. All us women are married to the same man. I think it is that—the fact that we're all of the same family—that brings married women so together. You like Mr. Brown-Smith, don't you?"

The curious thing was that I did like him. I had found in him, once I had got to know him, that comprehension of wives that I found nowhere in the ranks of my unmarried friends. For one thing, he didn't treat wives as a joke. Not that Brown-Smith hadn't a sense of humour. Some of his jokes about marriage were excruciating. The chief advantage of marriage

is that a husband is always sure of finding someone who hasn't heard the latest—or, if she has, it has been femininely bowdlerised. And there is nothing in unmarried life like the camaraderie of knowing that your friend's wife has heard the latest you told her husband at lunch-time.

I did like Brown-Smith, simply because he was so utterly married. Every man is at heart a married woman. Marriage had got me.

So there we were in the double bed, lying soberly side by side, discussing the question of asking the Brown Smiths to dine. And when we had definitely decided to join the lost legion of the married, we merely both turned our backs and settled down to go to sleep.

Suddenly Babette sat up in bed. "Henry," she exclaimed tragically, "we're married—hopelessly married! We've settled down—like all the rest of them!"

I was nearly asleep. I half turned my face. In the diffused milky white of the moonlight outside, filtering through our blinds, I saw Babette, faintly white, a vague vision of lace and loose hair, leaning over me. I felt her mournful eyes on mine.

"Well," I grunted, "there's no need for you to wake me up when I was just off to sleep to tell me that. Good night dear."

And I turned over and settled down, and Babette, that miracle of loveliness and love, turned over, too, and settled down, and after I had gently shoved her over to her half of the double bed—she's always sneaking more than her share—we went tranquilly to sleep.

DIALOGUE TWELVE

CLOTHES AND THE WOMAN

"Woman is Much More Versatile than Man She can get an hour's Breathless Excitement watching another Woman being Fitted for a new Coat and Skirt."—*The Babelle Birthday Book*

WHEN she, in passing you in the street, gives you from the depths of her passionate eyes that slow glance in which is put all her soul and 90 per cent. of the adorable rest of her, she is not inviting you to pick up your own handkerchief (out of your own pocket) and offer it to her under the pardonable impression that she had just dropped it; she is not hoping that you will accost her in the belief that she is Miss Smith, an old friend of yours; she is not telling you that, but for the calamity of not having been properly introduced to her, she would be delighted to know you, and, indeed, wouldn't be entirely averse from meeting you in front of the Post Office before luncheon. She is indulging in none of these delectable and daring speculations; she is merely wondering whether she won't buy one of those delicious pink pyjamas for women—you know, the ones with the ducky little cuffs on the ankles—instead of that entrancing open-work night-dress with the salmon-pink ribbons that have been marked down from two guineas to £2 1s. 6d.

That is why, when you do miraculously happen to pick

up the handkerchief she didn't drop, she fails to notice you or to hear your voice. Her seductive, mysterious eyes see right through you. They see that three-and-elevenpence-ha'penny blouse advertised in the morning's paper.

This is the tragedy of woman. She gives up to dress what is meant for male kind. Here she is, charming, accessible, adoring, living in this same world with us, its final fragile flower; and yet, in the mysterious recesses of her, she dwells apart in a world of her own, a world whose sea is a foam of lingerie, whose shore is the pavement, whose foliage is dress materials, whose blossoms are artificial flowers, whose stars are diamonds, whose scenery is shop windows, whose priests are shop-walkers, whose priestesses are dressmakers, and whose gods are afar off, creating every seven days new universes of fashions. Now and then into this beautiful world intrudes a man or a baby; she captures the one or dresses up the other, and then shuts the door on the intruders and goes happily back to her world of dreams.

Babette, my wife, was like that. If so delectable a piece of flesh and colour has a soul—neither she nor I ever really found the necessity—Babette's soul is one-third sentiment, and two-thirds dress. True, she says that she dresses solely to please me; but in the days before we met she was not entirely naked.

Once, in the ebb-tide after the honeymoon, I had tried to interest Babette in literature. I gave her a subscription to a library, and recommended books. She dutifully began to read; but she soon tired. She had a habit of dropping off to sleep by the time she reached the twenty-second page of a novel that I found deliciously feminine. I believe she did it only to allow me the opportunity of awakening her. There is something cosily and warmly luscious when you kiss a

woman—even your wife—just as she is waking from her dreams. It is like eating pineapples in the steam chamber of a Turkish bath.

Babette's indictment of the higher literature centred in the allegation that it wasn't thrilling enough. There was nothing in fiction quite so thrilling as in marriage, or in the fashion journals. Babette wondered whether Elinor Glyn had ever been married; if so, Babette could not understand why Elinor need seek for plots outside matrimony.

"What do I want to read silly romances for?" she exclaimed one night. "Nothing real happens in them, or if it does it's just dots. It seems to me that all the really truly interesting things always happen just at the place where the chapter ends. No; I can get more pleasure out of a heart-to-heart talk with any of my married friends. They tell me things about their husbands that Elinor Glyn never heard of. Literature is all right for girls before they're married; it's like the smell of soup as you sit down to dinner; but the soup is better than its smell. Married people don't need novels. They've learnt the dictionary off by heart."

However, Babette still read the paper. She glanced at the birth and marriage notices, since one must really keep oneself up-to-date, and the advertisements of the spring, mid-spring, summer, mid-summer, autumn, mid-autumn, winter, mid-winter, rebuilding, fire-salvage, annual and overstocked sales. Thus she never missed any of the news of the world—her world. All the dates of Babette's year were fixed by the sales. Thus, when the spring sales commenced, she did not need to look up the calendar to know that it was the middle of winter.

If Babette had been given the choice of going shopping or going to Heaven, she would choose the shops.

The other place could wait. And she adored bargains. That, really, was why she adored me.

"I never could understand," she used to say, "how I got you so easily. I often used to wonder why on earth no other woman had snapped you up before. But I was always a good hand at getting bargains. I know now why you were so easy; but, at any rate, you wear well."

Babette sets off shopping with the serious mien that once marked the woman on her way to church. Shopping is too sacred a business for Babette to allow another woman to accompany her. Her best girl friend might unconsciously influence her on the point of snapping up a bargain or turning down another. For Babette is unlike all her sex in knowing exactly what she wants, and not being happy till she gets it. Nor does she let anybody else be happy till she gets it. I have found Babette, as a wife, nicely mannered and generous in disposition. But the moment she enters a shop she is transformed. I know, because once she allowed me to accompany her. The next time I had an engagement elsewhere.

No savage ever so relentlessly tracked down his foe as Babette tracks down her bargain. Intent on stalking her game, no patience is too long-suffering, no exhaustion too heavy, to debar her from getting that one-and-three-quarter yards of val. at two and fivepence-ha'penny. She will spend a whole day in town, snatching a hurried and preoccupied lunch at one of the shops and come triumphantly home with two tiny paper parcels dangling from her dainty fingers. With savage exultation she tells me of her wearisome quest. She had had to pursue those two tiny parcels through seven large drapery establishments; she had had to keep her unperturbed way past the Scylla of stupid shop-girls and the Charybdis of smiling siren shop-walkers;

but she had got what she wanted and at sevenpence-ha'penny less than she expected. What does Babette want with Paradise?

The male does not guess the joys of shopping. He merely buys what he wants. He walks calmly into the best shop in the city for men's things, goes imperturbably to the right counter, not beguiled on his way by a tempting pair of purple silk socks or led astray by something smart in undershirts, and quietly says: "Give me a dress shirt at about seven-and-six. Sixteen collar."

Then he purchases one at eight-and-six and comes forth happy.

"Happy?" Babette echoes. "It's like taking in the milk at the back door. And I saw the same quality of dress shirt advertised last Thursday at eight-and-five. I would have got you one if I hadn't been so busy all day, getting those—well, you know. But I got them, and a bargain!"

The curious thing about Babette is that she combines this shrewdness in bargain-stalking with a pathetic belief in the honesty of drapers.

"Look," she said, one evening, "I got these for 19s. 11d."

I saw some folded lace and linen. "Oh," I said, in a non-committal tone.

"Wait, I'll try them on. You can't judge them properly unless I'm wearing them."

Babette was at that highly interesting stage of disrobing when a woman looks like a Tango Tea parade in the interest of somebody's corsets.

"Only nineteen-and-eleven," she purred.

"That means a sovereign," I noted.

"Nonsense! Why, it's only nineteen shillings."

"And elevenpence," I reminded her.

"Well," she triumphantly confutes me, "that's not

a pound. Besides, they had been marked down from 29s. 11d. It was Blinks's White Sale."

"But surely you know," I said, though it seemed a shame to talk mathematics with Babette preening herself before my eyes in her new purchase, "that the price of those is really 19s. 11d. Their actual value wouldn't be half that. The poor drapers have to make their profits. But if they priced them at 19s. 11d. you wouldn't buy them."

"Of course not."

"So, when their sale comes on they make out a ticket marked 29s. 11d., and then scratch that out and write in pencil '19s. 11d.', and you promptly snap them up."

Babette never did care for mathematics. "But aren't they ducky—on?" she cooed.

I agreed. They were worth a fortune—on Babette.

But there came a time in Babette's married life when even shopping palled before a new preoccupation. It was when she was certain.

"I must go and tell Nancy to-morrow," she shyly said that night in bed.

"But it's such a long way to go," I sleepily objected. "Why couldn't you write or telephone, instead of wasting a whole afternoon?"

"Henry, how could you?" Babette was shocked. "It's too—too sacred for that. Fancy telling anybody over the telephone! Besides, I must show her my new underthings, and I've heard that she's got a new model in that tango shade with the absurdest thing in feathers. I can't make out where she gets the money to buy models?"

"Perhaps her husband provides it?"

"But he doesn't get as much as you, and only last March she had another model—you know, that black straw with the green velvet, rather overpowering for Nancy's funny little nose, I've always thought, and

green rather shrieks against her complexion—you know, she never did have a skin, and fancy paying £4 11s. 6d. for such an ordinary shape; why, I only paid £3 19s. 6d. for mine, the one I wore at Mrs. Burston's bridge party on Thursday week, you remember, with my black *crêpe de Chine* and my Viennese shoes, everybody remarked on it, and now Nancy's got another model "

" Ah, but we've got something more valuable than Paris models, haven't we? " I reminded her.

" Yes," she said absently, " of course, that's why I'm going to see her to-morrow."

The following evening in bed she told me all about her exciting afternoon with Nancy. It appeared that Alice admired Babette's underthings almost as much as I did.

" And then, of course," Babette went on, " I had to try on Nancy's new model. These new squashy shapes make you do your hair differently, so I had to do my hair to try it on, and then do it again for my own hat. It suited me far better than it did Nancy. She said so. She's always so difficult with that baby nose, isn't she? And then she got out her new evening dress, and her lovely stockings—an anniversary present. Fancy, her husband actually gives her a present every anniversary of their marriage, and another on the anniversary of their first meeting, and another on the anniversary of their first kiss, and another on the anniversary of their engagement—no, that was the same anniversary as their first kiss. Rather absurd, don't you think, dearest?—but it's nice—the remembering, you know. I don't need all these anniversaries. No, you mustn't think of it, though on my way home from Nancy's I remembered that next Tuesday, the twenty-first, is the anniversary of the dance that we sat out on the steps and—you know. And they were the loveliest silk stockings—much too expensive for you, darling. They're only

to be got at Brown's, the first counter on the right, fourth floor, and there's a sweet-looking shop-girl serving. Nancy said she noticed several men in there the day she went, though it's a bit awkward for any man who isn't married, because you have to go through the underclothing department first. I always think underclothing departments are so like the sort of bedrooms that those sort of women must have. You see everything, don't you? But I suppose those men were buying silk stockings for their wives."

"More likely for their mothers," I suggested.

"Well," Babette, having sown the seed, was too clever a gardener to disturb the soil again, "after I'd tried on the stockings—they've got such a delicious feel, and your skin looks so delightfully naughty through them—and the new evening dress—at least, it wasn't new; she'd had it for three weeks, but I hadn't seen it before—and the lovely cloak—that was the first real kiss anniversary; it came a fortnight later than the first kiss anniversary—and the new corsets—I'd seen them advertised, you know, but you can't tell how comfortable they feel on you. They're beastly expensive, but then they lace down the front."

"But whatever made them do that?" I asked. "When there's all a woman's back to lace things up and down, why should anybody think of putting the laces in front where you can get at them in comfort?"

Babette admitted that it did seem absurd. "But it's the latest thing, and every woman who wants to be smart will have to have them, no matter how uncomfortable they are. And they give that new effect that's so popular now—the 'tummy' effect. Aren't I lucky to have a fashion coming in that will suit me so nicely?"

"Perhaps," I hopefully murmured, "now that they've got corsets lacing down the front, they'll think of doing

the same with dresses, and you'll be able to do your own hook-and-eyeing."

"Don't be absurd!" said Babette calmly. At times her opinion of the masculine intellect was not worth expressing.

"Well, then, of course," she rambled on, "it was time to have tea; and after that we got on to the latest fashion books. Nancy has one her husband orders for her from Paris, with hand-coloured illustrations and perfectly made faces. It's a lovely magazine. I wrote down the address. And then I looked at the time, and found that it was nearly six. But it was a perfectly lovely afternoon."

"But what did Nancy say about the—well, you know?" I asked. "Wasn't she surprised?"

"Oh, I forgot all about that till just as I was saying good-bye. I just had three minutes to catch my tram; and I knew you would be wanting your dinner."

"But what did she say?"

"Oh, she just laughed. She'd been intending to tell me something about herself all the afternoon, but somehow we were so busy that she forgot, too!"

DIALOGUE THIRTEEN

THE LAST DIALOGUE

" Marriage is a Mouse-trap, Baited by a Baby "—*The Babette Birthday Book*.

SHE stood hesitant, adorably wavering, her eyes lowered.

He looked at her, idly wondering, yet admiring. The brief year of their marriage had not dulled his appreciation of her instinctive grace.

She raised her glorious eyes, and in them he saw a new, ineffable light. She leaned swiftly toward him, and found his strong arms comfortingly about her.

" What is it, darling? " he asked gravely. " What is troubling my wee wifey? "

She paused, as it were summoning up her strength to tell him. Yet he was her husband, her loved one.

And, feeling her thus weak and wavering in his arms, he was greatly troubled. Through his alarmed mind swept vague, hurrying visions of calamities—she had made up her mind to get that Paris model at seven guineas; she had forged a cheque; her mother was coming to stay for a fortnight, and maybe more; she had irrevocably quarrelled with the cook; her best girl-friend had accused her of getting fat; she had discovered a grey hair; the new maid had smashed her best tea cup; she had become a Suffragette; she had decided to elope with the man who put down the new carpet; she had found out whom he was with that

Tuesday night he had been detained at his office; she had decided to take up Christian Science—a hundred possible calamities, liable to happen to any husband or any wife, took shape and worried him. Yet he merely tightened his arms about her slim, shrinking figure. She would surely know that, whatever her crime, he forgave her. So he held her while she summoned up her strength to speak.

When she did speak, it was with her head buried on his breast, and in a whisper. . . . (These dots represent the whisper.)

Amazed, astounded, overcome, he staggered, but with a herculean effort recovered himself, and lifting her reluctant chin he looked long in that beautiful face.

“No!” he asked, incredulously. “Impossible!”

Almost proudly she lifted her eyes to his. “It’s true,” she quavered, as a blush suffused her delicate features. “We’re going to have a little tiny . . .”

(These dots represent wifely modesty.)

He waited, outwardly unperturbed.

“A little tiny wee baby!” She whispered desperately. (Men, even husbands, were sometimes rather stupid.)

There! It was out. He knew now. They both knew. He crushed her to his breast.

“No, dearest,” she cried, with a quiet little triumph. “Don’t kiss me. You know you must be very careful with me—now.”

* * * * *

That is how it is done in novels. Always—in novels—the husband is utterly amazed and incredulous. You see, they were married, they loved each other, and they might have guessed, had either of them given the matter a moment’s consideration, that when married people love each other there is always the remote possibility of the arrival of a baby. Yet in novels the husband is the last person to suspect. Still he ought to have had

some suspicion. For one thing, the marriage service is brutally frank about the purpose of marriage—so frank that any novelist who quoted the words of the service in his book would rightly be censored by the subscription libraries. Yet, in novels, this is apparently the one subject that is not discussed by husbands and wives.

On the stage it is just the same—something like this—

He (*grimly, irrevocably*): "So this is the end of our happiness?"

She (*eagerly, struck by a new thought, arresting her sobs*): "Harold, listen! I have something to say to you."

He (*in a tone of utter amazement*): "You have something to say to me?"

She (*tonelessly*): "I have something to say to you, Harold."

He: "It is no use. We two, man and wife, have said all that can be said. We have said far, far too much. After this, what more can be said? (*in a tone that he strives to make casual*). I am leaving for Macgillicuddy Reeks by the first train after breakfast."

She (*sadly*): "Macgillicuddy Reeks?"

He (*grimly and finally*): "Macgillicuddy Reeks!"

She: "Ah! (*She moves a step toward him, but recoils from the cold impassivity of his face*). No; it's no use."

He (*sadly*): "Nothing is of any use—now."

She (*falling limply into the ottoman*): "Nothing!" (*She wipes the inside corners of her eyes, being careful not to touch her cheeks.*)

He (*drawn against his will to her*): "Alicia!" (*The telephone rings. He pauses. The telephone rings again. After a moment's hesitation he crosses up R. and snatches up the receiver*): "Yes . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . No . . . Yes . . . No . . . Yes." (*He puts down the telephone, and stands a moment looking down on her.*)

Then, with a shrug, he moves slowly to the bedroom door, up L.C.): "Good-night."

She (without looking up, into her handkerchief): "Good-night."

He (with a yearning movement stretches out his arms to her, then with a sigh, takes the key from the bedroom door and opens the door. A gorgeous double bed is disclosed. He gazes sadly upon it, then inserts the key carefully in the lock inside.)

She (All the while she has been wondering what he has been up to. The noise of the key arrests her attention. She looks up, horror-stricken, and springs toward the bedroom door): "Harold!"

He: "Good-night, Alicia!" (He passes inside and shuts the door. The noise of the key grating in the lock is so loud, in that hush of suspense, that it seems to come from the prompt wing.)

She (rushing up L.C. and hurling herself upon the locked door, with low intensity): "Harold!" (There is no answer). "Dinkeydumps!" (This is her pet name for him. This is what she used to call him fondly in those old, old days before they were married, seven months ago. She uses it now in a moment of feminine inspiration. If "Dinkeydumps" fails all is indeed over. She listens in a beautifully strained attitude. Then the key is heard grating harshly—quite obviously this time from the prompt side of the wings—and the door slowly opens. He is seen standing in the doorway in his pyjamas—a lonely figure with something infinitely appealing in his attitude.)

He (in a restrained voice): "Well?"

She: "I have something to say to you, darling."

He: "You have something to say to me?"

She: "Something that—(the telephone rings. She rushes to it). No . . . No . . . No! . . . No! (she drops the telephone, and rushes back). Something that might change all our lives, something that might even

prevent you from taking the first train after breakfast for Macgillicuddy Reeks ! ”

He (*struck*) : “ Ha ! (*coming down R.C.*). You have something to say to me ? ”

She : “ Yes . . . something . . . but (*she hesitates, a pitiable figure of beautiful distress*) — Come closer, Harold. Let me whisper.”

He (*hesitates, then, cheerfully contempluous, with the air that a husband always adopts to his wife when she is serious, he takes her outstretched arms and draws her to his breast*) : “ You have something to whisper to me ? ”

She : (*whispers*) . . .

He (*A look of utter amazement comes to his face. He straightens himself, triumphant in his striped pyjamas*) : “ No ? (*with tremendous awc, to himself*). A child ! ”

She (*to clear up any possible doubt, with emphasis*) : “ Our child ! ”

He (*slowly taking it in*) : “ Our (*the telephone rings He strides to it and hurls it to the floor*) — Our child ! ”

She (*back again in his arms, with infinite humility and tenderness*) : “ So for his (*struck by a doubt*) or her sake, Harold ! ”

He (*proudly*) : “ No, Alicia. For *your* sake. For the sake of his mother ! ”

(Curtain.)

* * * * *

Brought up on novels and the drama, as all of us moderns are, I had imagined that in some such dramatic way Babette would some day break the news to me. That was before I was married. After marriage many things lose their dramatic quality. This is how it actually happened.

“ Well ? ” I asked, after climbing into bed beside Babette.

"It's too soon to say definitely," my wife replied, as she had replied more than once before. But this time she added, "But the last two days I've been---well, different."

Getting out of bed, I lit the gas, and groped in the drawer of the dressing-table. There, carefully hidden beneath three bust-bodices, I found The Book. (Not the Book of Life, but the Book of Birth—the book that gives discreet and genteel advice to ladies who happen to be wives and possible mothers.) We both knew it off almost by heart.

"Let me see!" Babette cried, crawling out of bed; and under the gas-light we read and re-read the momentous paragraph. She clung happily to me.

Under any other circumstances my wife's embrace would have evoked an enthusiastic response from me; but, on the point of kissing her, I paused. I dared not do it. Babette was no longer a being to be cuddled; she had slipped from her husband's arms; she was dedicated to another ideal; there was something aloof, something almost sacred in her clinging figure. I feared to touch her lest I should hurt her.

In bed again we lay for a long time silent. And then I wondered: "It's bound to be a boy!"

"No," said Babette with decision; "It's going to be a girl."

I capitulated at once. It was Babette's affair, of course; and if she had decided on a girl there was nothing more to be said. But we talked excitedly for an hour, both feeling strangely important, and Babette decided to go and discuss the matter fully next day with her mother. And then we relapsed into our own thoughts, and I thought that Babette had slipped off to sleep.

I was just lapsing into unconsciousness when Babette stirred. She was quietly sobbing.

"What is it, dearest?" I whispered.

"Oh, love, I'm afraid! Afraid!"

A cold fear struck at my heart. "Nonsense," I hectoringly said. "It's only a natural business, after all. Millions of other women have done it."

"I know," she bravely ventured. "It's silly of me, but I'm afraid."

I felt a horrible brute. Why couldn't men have their fair share in this business? Why was everything put on to the woman? It seemed dreadfully unfair.

"Sweetheart," I said, "I'm sorry—dreadfully sorry. I never thought of what you'd have to go through—on your own, too. If only it wasn't true! We're enough for each other, aren't we, just we two? We don't want a third to come between us, do we?"

"Yes," said Babette, "we do. I do. And if it must be, I'll go through with it bravely. Only, dearest, be kind to me always—be kind to me."

I tried to comfort her, but I could not comfort myself. She sobbed herself to sleep. This marriage business isn't all fun.

And next morning she was pathetically brave, except for her pondering eyes.

And next evening she told me with shamed tears that it had all been a mistake. That silly book was all wrong. There wasn't going to be a little girl after all.

I swore a silent oath that there would be.

And when a few months later we knew for certain that there would be one, Babette happily confessed to me that, on that occasion, she, too, had sworn a silent oath.

Then began the long, long wait. Babette had always been at the caprice of her moods; now she became the slave of them. One day she would be simply mad with the brimming joy of life; a daylong song on her lips and a dance in her toes; and that evening she would be morose, ill-tempered, miserable, even snappy. All I

could do was to stand aside and watch the life-process taking charge of her. She had slipped away from her husband; she had sworn allegiance to something other. She had days when she withdrew herself from me; her eyes, bent on her interminable sewing, saw strange, uncommunicable visions. And then she would break down and tell me with tears how sorry for me she was. She was going to have a baby; and something, not herself, had shut me out of all her rapture. Then would come those dreaded wakings in the night, when Fear—vague, tremendous Fear—gripped her with icy claws. She knew she was drifting away from me, yet how pathetically, how wistfully she blindly sought, with unexpected little childish tenderness, to take me with her on the dark road she must tread alone—with that glorious light beaconing for her ahead.

And almost daily we consulted The Book. And as each succeeding symptom duly arrived, Babette proudly preened herself. She was managing this new and difficult business of having a baby with all the ease and certainty of a mother of ten. Sometimes, even, she had symptoms that The Book didn't mention. On those days she sang with happiness.

But there was another aspect of her case that saddened her.

"It's my figure," she would whisper. "I looked at myself to-day, and . . . oh, it's horribly unfair."

"But," I protested, "I can't see any difference."

"Nonsense, you must. Why only yesterday, Mrs. Marshall asked me straight out. It's nice of you to say that you don't notice it, dearest; but you're just saying that to please me. What makes it so much worse is that I have a figure to lose. There's heaps of girls that having a baby would improve."

But I convinced her, really, that I didn't notice any difference. For the truth was that I didn't. I don't

know whether all husbands are the same; I am only a beginner as a husband myself; but unconsciously I had got into the habit of not seeing Babette's figure. Somehow my eyes refused to see it—though I noticed it immediately in the case of other women.

It was curious to find how interested both Babette and I got in Mrs. Bridges. She was a mere acquaintance of ours; neither Babette nor I had ever cared anything for her. Yet Babette got to know, by means of that world-wide secret freemasonry among women—that gossip that goes on everywhere between women when babies are on the tapis—that Mrs. Bridges “expected” the very same week that Babette did. That fact made my wife and Mrs. Bridges the closest of friends. They visited each other constantly, almost daily conferring . . . and comparing. I, too, got drawn into the friendship, and Bridges—the sort of fellow that hitherto I had merely nodded to—and I had several drinks together on the absorbing subject, and at least one bet. That one momentous fact swept away all our differences. We arranged that whoever won would inform the other at the first possible moment.

Suddenly, amid all these growing excitements, Babette got anxious about the wall-paper in the bed-room. She was sure that it wasn't at all the right tint of wall-paper for babies to be born to. Pink, she thought . . . I had to choose new wall-paper.

Once she had been an enthusiastic gardener, spending happy hours pottering about in a big shady hat with toy tools, pulling up seedlings and carefully watering weeds. Now she let the garden go—with excellent cultural results. She was too busy sewing. The amount of clothing that new-born babies require, especially the amount of ribbons! And the quantities of clothing that new mothers must have, especially for convalescing in! The main thing, I learnt, that new-born babies insist

upon is that everything must be hand-made. There were, too, grave preoccupations about cradles. . . .

The nurse had been ordered well in advance. But a few months later Babette suddenly took a deep distrust to the nurse. I had thought her an excellent woman—a little too fond of discussing things in whispers with my wife. Now Babette sobbingly declared that she hated her; and that she was sure baby would hate her, too.

"It would be a terrible thing for baby to have to associate with somebody she didn't like at the very moment she arrived, wouldn't it?"

So I ordered a new nurse. By now the house was in a state of wild excitement. One night it culminated. At 2 a m. I telephoned for the nurse. And next morning Babette could look neither the nurse nor myself in the face. Nothing had happened. However, it didn't matter so much after all, as there was no news from the Bridges' stable. It was evidently going to be a neck and neck race. All that day the superfluous nurse waited around, trying to look as if she wasn't wanted. But Babette had a determined look on her face. She felt that she had deceived both of us, and she meant to carry out her contract at the earliest possible moment. But that night nothing happened either, and Babette declared that she wasn't going to have that reproachful-looking nurse waiting about any more, freezing her with a baleful glance. So we packed her off; but, unknown to Babette I used to let her in surreptitiously every night after eleven, gave her a bed in the spare room, and shooed her off before Babette got up. So things went on for a fortnight.

"I'm sure that it's all a mistake," Babette sobbed. "There's no baby at all."

In vain I produced *The Book* and quoted paragraphs of symptoms. Babette refused to be comforted till I got the doctor. He cheerfully advised her to persevere.

This baby business seemed to me shockingly mismanaged. Here we were all ready—to the last open-work bed-jacket—and that stubborn idiot of a baby refused to arrive. However, the Bridges' baby showed the same stupid determination.

Then, one night, after Babette had gone to sleep in a dreadfully pessimistic mood, she woke me with a sharp cry. I rushed for the nurse. That hateful woman had a look at her, then went back and dressed with awful deliberation, fiddling over her cuffs and appealing to me to say whether her cap was on straight when looked at from the back. And Babette pushed me from her with a look of positive loathing.

After that I had seven, or seven hundred, hours to appreciate how useless, how utterly superfluous a husband is. I pretended to make myself useful, telephoning for the doctor and doing a hundred quite unnecessary things. I couldn't stay in the house. I couldn't stay outside it. I tracked miles up and down stairs. I hovered outside that cruelly shut door, listening, and then I had to rush away so that I couldn't listen.

And it was our double bed—that dear double bed we had chosen so lovingly, that double bed that had been the scene of all our intimate talks—it was that double bed that was now the operating table for that brutally cheerful doctor and that balefully business-like nurse, and it was my Babette that had to lie on it in torture. That was its use, its destined purpose. All the while, through all our interminable delightful dialogues, it—like Death—had been waiting for my darling Babette.

Then—I don't know how many years after—as I waited miserably half-way up the stairs, I heard a kitten crying. A tiny, weak kitten, mewing with determination. I wrathfully wondered where that kitten was; from the sound it seemed to be actually in

Babette's bedroom. I didn't even know that there was a kitten in the house—it struck me as dreadfully inconsiderate of our cat to have kittens just at the moment that Babette was having a baby. So like a cat. And how criminally careless of that callous nurse to allow a kitten in the bedroom at this time! I wanted to rush in and hurl that kitten out of the window. It was mewling so strenuously that I couldn't hear a sound from Babette.

Had they killed her? I had always hated that doctor, with his big, brutal hands. Maddened, I knocked at the door. I didn't care what happened, but I was going to wring the neck of that kitten . . . and after that I was going to wring the neck of the doctor.

The nurse opened the door, with a weary smile on her face.

"It's a girl—and hasn't the little beggar got lungs!" she whispered. There was a horrible sickly odour about her. Had she been drinking?

"I must see Babette!" I cried.

She smiled. "Go away for a walk, and come back in half-an-hour, and then, perhaps if you're very quiet, you may come in for just a peep. Everything was splendid, perfectly normal, and the baby is a beauty."

I waited downstairs. The kitten continued to mew.

At last the doctor came heavily downstairs. "Splendid!" he said wearily. "It's my third case to-night, and this was the easiest of the lot."

"Easy?" I cried. "Easy!"

* * * * *

A month later I was allowed back into the double bed.

I lay happily watching Babette—the slim and white Babette of her wedding morn—feeding tiny Babettekins.

Babette was fiercely proud. To her, Babettekins was the loveliest, the sweetest, the most deliciously

eatable thing on earth. And, to my shame, I admit that I thought so, too.

And we had beaten the rival stable by three days!

* I lay blissfully content and watched my wife. Now, only now I understood why we had fallen in love with each other, why we had married, why we had bought a double bed. Her figure, that once I had believed was merely made to cuddle and caress, I now saw was meant for nothing of the kind. Her beautiful bosom was soft and rounded and white—not for me, but the babe. And didn't Babettekins know it!

Then, with infinite care—these atoms are so breakable—Babette placed Babettekins between us, and we leant gently over her and watched her sunk in a drunken sleep. And as we watched, awe-struck, suddenly Babettekins raised a tiny petal of a hand, and lifted one absurd little finger, pointing.

"Oh, the duckeykins!" Babette breathed in rapture.

Then, perhaps an hour later, Babettekins decided to wake. She opened those violet depths of eyes and looked gravely and solemnly through me. I don't know what she saw, but immediately she began, without emotion or anger, to yell. Babette gathered her to her breast, and, sitting up in bed, began furiously to rock the little pink imp, with a puckered face that looked like a volcanic convulsion.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Shall I get the doctor?"

"Nonsense!" Babette scorned the mere man. "It's only the kind of pain that every baby has."

"Babette!" I said.

She didn't hear me. She was too busy trying to hush Babettekins. Perhaps she couldn't hear me. Babettekins was too busy yelling.

I knew then that our double bed dialogues were over. Never again could we two talk to each other of intimate

things in that delightful hour of the darkness before sleep. For there were three in the double bed now; and you can't have a dialogue when there are three persons present. •

Especially when the third person is busy all the time soliloquizing.

THE END

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